The Epistle James

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James 1:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

From the very first verse of this epistle by the “Brother of the Lord,” it should already be clear that its contents are primarily intended for believers who live between the return of Christ to the Mount of Olives and the beginning of the “thousand years.” The emphasis lies especially on the final thirty-three years of that period, which in total will last forty years (a generation). In studying the Epistle of James, it is of the greatest importance to realise that this letter was written in connection with the revelation of the Kingdom of Christ here on earth. This was true in the time of Acts, and it will certainly be true in the time that follows the present (fifth) dispensation.

The epistle deals with subjects and activities that apply to the coming dispensation, in which God will no longer work at His plan of salvation in hiddenness as He does in this present dispensation. The Epistle of James is especially intended to indicate that faith must be living, which is expressed in works. James further addresses the danger of the tongue and places strong emphasis on perseverance until the dawning of the thousand years. Whoever becomes a believer in the next dispensation will receive the promise that he shall enter the Kingdom, provided that he holds fast to the faith, even if he is in danger.

In order to understand the contents of the epistle, it is necessary to understand the address. This letter was written by James, a servant of God. “Servant of God” was his rank, his office, or his calling. The heading of this epistle consists of the sender, the recipients, and a greeting. “Greeting” is a very customary form of salutation.

There is often discussion about when and in what context this epistle was written. The difficulty with such questions is always that they are asked beforehand rather than afterwards. Just as with Hebrews, it only becomes clear—after the letter has been studied—by whom it was written, to whom it was written, and in what context. These questions can therefore only be answered from the epistle itself. We will cite a few points and a few verses in advance, before these verses are later discussed in their direct context.

Martin Luther

This Epistle of James is controversial, both because of the relative uncertainty concerning the author (there are four men named James in the New Testament) and because of its contents. Martin Luther did not speak favourably of this letter. In fact, he even thought that it did not belong in the Bible at all. He called it “a straw epistle,” one that ought to be burned because it was supposedly without substance. He likened it to wood, hay, and stubble. On one level this is understandable, but his conclusion was rather premature. He simply did not know what to do with it.

To put it briefly—although this does him some injustice—Martin Luther did not come to faith through theological study, but because somewhere he saw a Bible chained up and began to read it. He discovered that Scripture teaches that man is justified by faith alone. In this connection Romans 1:16–17 is cited, where it says that the just shall live by faith. Luther thus learned justification by faith alone—not by works, but by faith.

He learned this while the Epistle of James speaks of the fact that a man is not justified by faith alone, but also by works. In James 2 there are statements such as: “faith without works is dead” (2:20), and: “Abraham was justified by works, for he did certain things” (2:21). It is therefore understandable that Luther stumbled over this epistle. He had just more or less rediscovered the truth that a man is justified by faith alone. When he then encountered verses that seemed to relativise this, it was only to be expected that he would stumble.

Luther did recognise the Jewish character of this epistle and clearly saw certain features that are rather difficult to reconcile with, for example, the writings of the apostle Paul, particularly in Romans and Galatians. It is reconcilable, but not easily so. Luther had carried out an extensive study of the Epistle to the Romans and saw clearly that promises originally made to Israel do indeed have application to the Church in the present dispensation. But by applying the prophecies to the Church, he no longer left any room for the position of Israel as a nation.

This error is often made in circles that teach dispensations. People see the place of Israel, but then no longer see in what relationship the Church stands to Israel, nor in what relationship the Church stands to the promises made to Abraham. Or the opposite extreme occurs: one no longer sees the place of Israel in relation to the promises to Abraham. One usually chooses one side and defends it in such a way that one sets oneself against the other application of the same promise. That is the great error. Both are true. It is not easy to learn this, because one tends to dig oneself into a fixed viewpoint. Then there is no longer any eye for the multiple applications of the Word of God.

This happened to Luther and Calvin, and also to their followers. As a result, Luther had no eye for the position of Israel. He subsequently went down in history as an antisemite, as a hater of the Jews. To what extent this is entirely correct, or whether he later corrected himself, I do not know.

Luther recognised and acknowledged the Jewish character of the Epistle of James, and for that very reason he did not know what to do with it. This applies to James, but also to another very typically Jewish Bible book, even more Jewish in character than James: the Book of Esther. In the entire Book of Esther, God is not mentioned at all. Moreover, it is entirely about the Jews. That, too, found no place within that line of thinking.

These matters are, of course, interconnected. One simply had no eye at all for the promises made to Israel, and therefore one could not place these writings—although then one would also have to doubt certain other books of the Bible.

Who Is James and which James are we talking about?

The James who wrote the epistle is James the brother of the Lord Jesus, not one of the Twelve apostles.

Several men named James appear in the New Testament:

1. James son of Zebedee, brother of John (one of the Twelve; martyred in Acts 12:2)
2. James son of Alphaeus (one of the Twelve, little known)
3. James the brother of Jesus – the author of this epistle

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the third option.

James the Brother of the Lord
James is explicitly identified as "the Lord's brother":

- Matthew 13:55 / Mark 6:3 – Jesus' brothers are named: *James, Joses, Simon, and Judas*
- Galatians 1:19 – Paul says he saw no apostle except *"James, the Lord's brother"*
- Jude 1:1 – Jude identifies himself as *"the brother of James"*

This James:

- Did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry (John 7:5)
- Came to faith after the resurrection
- Was personally visited by the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7)

Leader of the Jerusalem Church
After the resurrection, James emerges as the leading figure in the Jerusalem church:

- Acts 12:17 – Peter sends news specifically to James
- Acts 15 – James gives the final judgment at the Jerusalem Council
- Acts 21:18 – Paul reports to James and the elders

Importantly:

- Peter does not preside
- James functions as the recognized authority

This leadership role fits:

- His family relationship to Jesus
- His deep rootedness in Jewish law and tradition
- Jerusalem's role as the center of Israel's hope and the Davidic throne

2. **Why Is the Letter Addressed to "the Twelve Tribes in the Dispersion**"?

The Meaning of "Twelve Tribes"
The phrase "the twelve tribes" refers to the whole nation of Israel, not merely Jews in a symbolic sense.

- "James" = Greek form of Jacob
- Jacob → Israel → twelve tribes
- The address is deliberately national and covenantal

This is not poetic language—it is ethnic, historical, and theological.

The Dispersion (Diaspora)
Israel had been scattered long before James wrote:

- 722 BC – Ten tribes exiled by Assyria
- 586 BC – Judah and Benjamin exiled by Babylon
- By the first century, Jews lived throughout the Roman world

Even in Acts 2 (Pentecost), Jews from many nations are present in Jerusalem.
Thus:

- All twelve tribes were in dispersion
- Only a minority lived in Judea

James' address therefore fits perfectly with first-century reality.

This Epistle of James therefore bears a clearly Jewish character. An example of this is James 1:1, where it says that the letter is written to the twelve tribes in the dispersion.

It is clear that this James was a leader in the church at Jerusalem, therefore before the destruction of the city. This letter was evidently written long before that time. Yet it does speak of the twelve tribes in the dispersion.
In any case, at that time ten of the twelve tribes were already scattered. The two tribes were in fact also in dispersion. It even becomes clear from the Gospels that Judaism in general was spread throughout the then-known world, of which only a part had returned from exile to Judea. The greater part of Judaism had never returned from the captivity—the ten tribes certainly not, perhaps only a few individuals. Of the Jews, of the two tribes, only a smaller part had returned.
That is why, for example, on the Day of Pentecost mention is made of the many strangers who were in Jerusalem. These were indeed Jews—Jews from abroad. It is precisely the same situation as today, in which a part of the Jews has returned to the Jewish nation. That is only a minority of the Jews, for the rest are still in the dispersion, in the diaspora.
The address is therefore not in conflict with the view that this epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem. This letter is written to the twelve tribes in the dispersion—and not only to the Jews in the dispersion.

James, the brother of Jesus
It is somewhat disputed who this James actually is. The general view is that this James is the one who is explicitly mentioned, for example in Acts 15, as the leader of the church in Jerusalem at that time. He was the brother of the Lord. I have not the slightest doubt about that. This James was not one of the twelve apostles, but he was the legitimate brother of the Lord Jesus Himself. Several Scriptures show this.

> Matthew 13:54–56
> 54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?
> 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?
> 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

In verse 54 a synagogue is mentioned. There it is translated as “synagogue.” Why it is not translated that way in the Epistle of James I do not know. Yet James speaks precisely about the synagogue (James 2:2) and about the origin of wisdom (James 1:5). Here, again, those things appear together.
If you know nothing else, you would quite naturally conclude from this verse that Mary bore other children as well, namely James, Joses, Simon, and Judas, and also daughters. That is no problem. As far as I am concerned, it is certain that this James and this Judas are the ones who

later wrote the epistles that bear their names. “Jude” is therefore the Epistle of Jude, the brother of James, the brother of the Lord Jesus, born of Joseph and Mary. One can always reason it away, but here it is at least clear that people know the Lord Jesus as the son of Joseph and Mary, and that they know His four brothers and also some sisters.

> Matthew 27:56
> Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

In verse 55 it says that many women were present at the crucifixion. Here a Mary is mentioned as the mother of James and Joses. If you ask me, that is the mother of the Lord Jesus Himself. That she was at the cross is beyond doubt. The only remarkable thing is that it does not say that she is the mother of Jesus Himself. If she was the mother of James and Joses, what have these two to do with it? If this is not the mother of the Lord Jesus, then who are this James and Joses, and why are they mentioned here?

Of Mary Magdalene it is known that she had a special relationship to the Lord and that she was delivered by Him in a special way. The question is then: what relationship did this Mary have to the Lord? If she had no relation to Him, why is she mentioned here? The alternative is that she is the mother of the Lord Jesus. The fact that this is not said here has a reason. It is here specifically about the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. The human family is therefore not named. In order that we might nonetheless know that this is that Mary, she is described as the mother of James and Joses. These are two of the four whom we met in Matthew 13:55. Simon and Judas are also named there.

James was the eldest brother of the Lord Jesus. “James” is the Greek form of “Jacob.” “Joses” is the Greek form of “Joseph.” That is the name of the legal father of the Lord Jesus. The family relationship is embedded in those names. Jacob stands for the people of Israel, and Joseph had the birthright among the tribes of Israel (Jacob). (According to Matthew 1:16, the father of Mary was also called Jacob.) This James is therefore indeed “the brother of the Lord.”

People reason away the idea that this is Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, by saying that it would have been worded differently in this text. But anyone who does this has to reason away a great deal.

> Mark 6:3
> Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

Again four brothers and sisters are mentioned.

There is much disagreement about the following verse:

> Mark 15:40
> There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome;

They watched the cross. Here it says “James the less” (“James minor”). We would say “James junior.” There was also a “James the great.” This verse is actually the same as Matthew 27:56, except that Salome is added here.

The difference of opinion lies in the fact that some say that James the less is a different apostle, namely one of the Twelve. Among the twelve apostles there are two men called James. One is a son of Zebedee, a brother of John. James and John were the sons of Zebedee. Peter, James, and John are often named together. That James is the one mentioned most frequently, and he is the first apostle to die a martyr's death. He is the first to disappear from the scene. That is remarkable, because another James more or less steps into his place—that is James, the brother of the Lord, whom we are now discussing. That in itself is rather striking.
The other James among the twelve disciples was James the son of Alphaeus. Some now say that James the less in Mark 15:40 is that son of Alphaeus, but I am convinced that "James the less" is the brother of the Lord Jesus. Both views can be found in reference works, but there is a lot more said in this verse. These are James and Joses and Salome, sons and daughter of Mary. I have not the slightest difficulty concluding that James, Joses, Jude, and Simon were brothers of the Lord Jesus, and that one of His sisters was named Salome.
There is nothing strange in this, because we are dealing with a family that held the inheritance right to the throne of David, the throne of Israel. The names we encounter in this family are entirely in harmony with that.
Jesus = Jehovah is/brings salvation.
James = Jacob.
Joses = Joseph.
Simon = hearing, believing—he is a picture of the believing remnant in Israel, and that is indeed what we are dealing with here.
Judas = Judah, Jew. It concerns the house, the tribe, and the sceptre of Judah, to which this family belongs.
Salome is the feminine form of Solomon, the son of David, the prince of peace.

> Mark 15:47
> And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.

I take this to be the same Mary, namely the mother of the Lord, although it is expressed somewhat strangely.

> Mark 16:1
> And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

Is it not obvious that the family of the Lord Jesus would be present at this event? Thus this Mary is, in harmony with all those other Scriptures, the mother of the Lord Jesus, and therefore the mother of James, the second eldest son, and of Salome, presumably the eldest daughter.

> Luke 24:10
> It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.

Who else could this Mary be? Would this then be a Mary who would have to be married to Alphaeus? That is the other explanation. The other James among the apostles, the son of Alphaeus, would then have a certain Mary

as mother, who is never once mentioned together with Alphaeus and otherwise plays no role. That seems to me highly improbable. Nor can this easily be the mother of the other apostle James, for then she would have to be the wife of Zebedee. Then she would not only be the mother of James, but also of John.

We read about “Mary the mother of James and Joses,” while in the preceding verse (Mark 15:39) it is said of the Lord Jesus: “Truly this man was the Son of God.” In the next verse Mary is not called the mother of Jesus, because Jesus has just been referred to as the Son of God. That is to indicate the distance that still exists there.

> John 7:2–5
> 2 Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand.
> 3 His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.
> 4 For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.
> 5 For neither did his brethren believe in him.

John 7:5 is an important verse in this connection. According to verse 2, the feast of tabernacles was at hand, and thus also the Day of Atonement, in the seventh month. The brothers of the Lord were evidently impressed by the works that the Lord Jesus did. The Lord Himself apparently thought that people ought to speak about Him openly. According to His brothers, He should then also perform those signs openly. If you want publicity, you must do something that everyone sees, something that takes place in public. His brothers seemed good advisers, but they did not believe in Him.

If at that time they had truly believed in Him, they would not have made these statements, for then they would have known that such publicity does not actually depend on the deeds of the Man in question. If publicity is to come, it comes because God wills it. The Lord Himself sometimes made efforts to keep certain things secret. Not everything was intended for public knowledge. John 7:5 teaches that the brothers of the Lord at least at this point did not believe in Him. At a later stage they evidently did believe.

> John 7:6–10
> 6 Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready.
> 7 The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.
> 8 Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.
> 9 When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee.
> 10 But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

Here the old truth about the hidden Kingdom of the Lord Jesus is illustrated, for the feast of tabernacles is a picture of the Kingdom, of the Messianic reign. He went up to it in secret. That speaks of the initially

hidden Kingdom. The Lord would come later than people would actually expect.
His brothers did not believe. They did indeed go up to the feast—they belonged to the believing remnant of Israel, otherwise they would not have gone up to the feast. So they were certainly orthodox, but they did not believe that He truly was the promised Messiah. That only came later.

> John 19:25–26
> 25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.
> 26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

At any rate, Mary Magdalene and the mother of the Lord Jesus were present. We may therefore also expect that, especially in the so-called synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), mention would be made of the mother of the Lord Jesus at the cross. If the Mary referred to there is not she, then we miss her altogether. That is highly unlikely. That is then a very far-fetched construction, devised in order to prove the perpetual virginity of Mary so that she may then be admired or even worshipped—for that is where it leads.

> Acts 1:14
> These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

This is after the resurrection, and evidently His brothers now do believe. In verse 13 some disciples or apostles are named who were gathered together. The expression “brethren” clearly designates the other sons of Mary and Joseph, but, if you ask me, Joseph had long since died. I believe that Joseph died before the public ministry of the Lord Jesus, because otherwise He could not have taken to Himself the title “Son of man.” Son of man is the title of the eldest living rightful heir to the throne. That would then have had to be Joseph. As long as Joseph lived, the Lord Jesus could not call Himself the Son of man, nor the Son of David.
The woman would not sit on the throne, unless she were unmarried. Through her marriage, the rights to the throne that belonged to Mary passed to Joseph (also a descendant of Judah). Joseph held those rights to the throne, and they were legally transferred to the Lord Jesus—but only after the death of Joseph. Joseph had evidently died before the Lord Jesus was thirty years old, although we do not find this explicitly stated anywhere in the Bible. After Jesus was twelve, Joseph is no longer mentioned. Joseph had to play a very peculiar and subordinate role. I think he knew that from the beginning. He had the role of legal father of the Lord Jesus. He is never mentioned in any other connection.
In Acts 1:14, therefore, the brethren of the Lord Jesus are mentioned. Because the wording is so general, they were probably all His brothers. They are here in the company of the apostles mentioned in verse 13. The next time James is mentioned is in:

> Acts 12:17
> But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.

And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

Acts 12 relates the story of Peter's deliverance from prison. He is led out of the prison by angels. If you are not paying attention, you might think that this James is one of the twelve apostles. Peter, James, and John are often named together, so if something happens to Peter, it seems logical that he should leave a message for James. But that cannot be, for in verse 2 of this chapter it is said that Herod Agrippa had killed James. It is stated explicitly which James that was.

Acts 12:2

And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

Here one of the sons of Zebedee, one of the three apostles Peter, James, and John, was put to death. Herod knew that Peter, James, and John were the most important men among the apostles.

Acts 12:3–4

3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

The apostle James the Great had just been killed. After that, Peter is imprisoned. As soon as Peter is freed again, he says: "Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren." From this I conclude that this concerns the James who himself was one of "the brethren," and not in a merely spiritual sense, for Peter said this to men who were already his brethren in the spiritual sense. Thus it must refer to brethren in the natural sense. The report of Peter's deliverance had to be passed on to James, the brother of the Lord, and thereby also to the other brothers of the Lord, including Jude, who later wrote the Epistle of Jude.

Another conclusion is that this James had evidently become an important figure among the believers and in the church at Jerusalem. That is not surprising, because this James was the eldest brother of the Lord Jesus. In all the lists he is mentioned first. He is the son of Joseph and Mary. Joseph had died. The Lord Jesus was the eldest heir, but He had also died. Who now holds the rights to the throne of Judah, the sceptre of Judah, the throne over Israel? Who is the heir of David? This James!

Since in those days the coming of the Messianic Kingdom was being openly preached, and since the first Christian congregation in Jerusalem also had all the characteristics of that Kingdom and was governed as if it were such a Kingdom, it is obvious that, in the absence of the lawful heir to the throne, the Lord Jesus Himself, James, as His eldest brother, would act as regent in His stead upon that throne. It is therefore quite natural that he should become the leader of the church in Jerusalem. The twelve apostles were passed over in this respect.

Acts 15

In Acts 15 the first council, the first synod, or, if you will, the first church or brethren's meeting at Jerusalem is described. Peter and Paul come there to report on their work. Through their preaching, Gentiles are coming to faith. A perfectly fair question then arises, namely whether the believers

from among the Gentiles must also be placed under the Law. You see how Jewish that congregation still is. Judaism after all lives under the Law. If those believers are placed under the Law, they must also be circumcised. The one who then finally gives the ruling is James. First Peter clearly states his view.

> Acts 15:10–11
> 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
> 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Peter says here that Jews are saved in the same way as Gentiles, namely not by the Law but by grace. Circumcision is therefore in itself not needed for salvation. Then they all become very quiet—and I can well understand that—because what Peter says here is, in a sense, the world turned upside down. He does not say that the Gentiles are saved in the same way as the Jews, but that the Jews are saved in the same way as the Gentiles. That is a strong statement for an apostle of the circumcision. So it becomes very quiet. Someone must then make a decision (verse 19), and that is James. It is therefore not one of the Twelve, but someone who came to faith later.

> Acts 15:13–16
> 13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:
> 14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.
> 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,
> 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

“Simeon” is Peter—a believing Peter, a “hearing one.” James here points out that, according to the prophecies and according to Peter, God is first taking from among the Gentiles a people for His Name, and only after that will He raise up again the fallen hut, the tabernacle, of David. That is a remarkable statement, because James himself by nature belongs to that fallen hut of David. The lawful heir to the throne of David according to the Law is here saying that, as far as that throne is concerned, nothing will come of it for the time being, because God is first doing something else. For that reason he was the very man to make such a declaration. Whether he was already a leading brother before this, or whether he became so as a result, I do not know; but he appears as the leading figure in the church at Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where the throne of David—and thus the throne of the Lord Jesus—stood and where it will stand again.

> Acts 21:17–18
> 17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.
> 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

A council meeting was held at James’s house. This indicates his prominent position in the church at Jerusalem. He is the natural successor to the

throne of David, although the Lord Jesus was not dead but simply not on earth. Strictly speaking, James was not the heir, but remained second in line, because the Lord Jesus lives. The Lord still lives, and therefore that line of descent ultimately plays no decisive role. That is why James could also say that the fallen hut of David would be raised up again by the Lord Himself.

The opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15 speak of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and of His appearances, and therefore of the evidences of His resurrection.

> 1 Corinthians 15:7–8
> 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.
> 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

Apparently, according to the information given by the apostle Paul, the Lord Jesus at some point revealed Himself once, specially and exclusively, to James—apart from the other apostles. When that was, I do not know, but in any case it marks the latest possible moment for his conversion. He probably believed earlier, but it is not unthinkable that he came to faith in much the same way as the apostle Paul did, namely because the Lord appeared to him after His resurrection. That would fit, because verse 8 immediately follows verse 7.

James and Paul are now mentioned in one breath, because the Lord revealed Himself personally to them both in a special way. James is also mentioned again in the Epistle to the Galatians, but that has already been considered in connection with Acts 15, where it is also about the council at Jerusalem.

In Galatians 1:19 the apostle Paul says that he had been in Jerusalem:

> Galatians 1:19
> But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

James was not a brother of the Lord, but the brother of the Lord. In a sense, they were all “brethren of the Lord” by virtue of their new birth, but James was, in addition, the natural brother of the Lord Jesus. “Half-brother” is an unscriptural expression. He was the lawful brother of the Lord Jesus. Paul had visited Peter in Jerusalem and remained there fifteen days. Of the other apostles he saw only James, the brother of the Lord.

> Galatians 2:9
> And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

“Cephas” is Peter, and this takes place on the occasion referred to in Acts 15. How strikingly it is written here: James, Cephas, and John. This is a different James from the one repeatedly named in the Gospels. There, James and John were brothers, the sons of Zebedee. In Acts 12:2 we read that that James fell by the sword of Herod Agrippa. He has evidently been more or less “replaced” by the other James, the “brother of the Lord.” The naming of a different James in the same trio is a picture of new birth: Jacob had to be born again.

> Galatians 2:12

> For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

Some had come from the church in Jerusalem to Antioch, where Peter was (verse 11). “From James” now functions not only as a designation of that one man, but even as a designation of the entire church at Jerusalem. That is because he was the leader there—not Peter, but James.

> Jude 1:1
> Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:

The opening is similar to that of the Epistle of James itself. From this we may infer that Jude is one of the other four brothers of the Lord Jesus. The name “James” is simply “Jacob.” Thus this epistle is immediately linked with Israel—quite rightly so, as its contents show.

> James 1:1
> James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

In the Roman Catholic Church it is taught that the Lord Jesus had no brothers or sisters at all. People speak of the “Immaculate Conception” of Mary; by this they mean that Mary remained a virgin all her life and therefore, in any case, bore no other children. Somehow there must apparently be a way to reason away those Scripture passages that do speak of “the brethren of the Lord.” In any case, that is what is done.

The letter is written to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad. The twelve tribes are, in effect, Jacob. The twelve tribes constitute the natural nation of Israel. It is therefore quite fitting that Jacob (James) should write to Israel.

It says, “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” The tribes of Israel are scattered, in the diaspora. This diaspora, this scattering, has existed since the Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. The captivity of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin—the Jews—began in 598 BC. The Jews, the two tribes, have thus been scattered since the days of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. That was roughly the beginning of “the times of the Gentiles.” That captivity has never yet ended. Never has the whole of Israel been regathered into the land. That will indeed take place, but only after this letter has been delivered.

The letter written to twelve tribes in the dispersion must be delivered before those twelve tribes have returned from the dispersion. If you do not believe that the twelve tribes will return out of the dispersion, there is a problem. Where then are you to deliver this letter? To whom is it addressed? You simply would not know where to take it.

The difficulty is that on the one hand we plainly read that the letter is written to the twelve tribes in the dispersion—that is obviously the twelve tribes of Israel—while on the other hand it becomes clear from the contents that the letter is written to believers. That is also why some apply this entire epistle directly to believers. It is absolutely true that this

letter is written to believers, but that is not stated in the address. It appears from the contents, and therein lies the problem.
Another difficulty is that James himself lived in the days of Acts, after the resurrection of Christ and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He thus belongs to the Church, the Body of Christ. The Church has a heavenly future and a heavenly inheritance. God is therefore now not occupied with the setting up and revelation of the Kingdom on earth, but with the calling of the Church from among the nations. That is the calling of the Body, of which we—just as James—are part. If James therefore writes to believers, he is, in fact, writing to members of the Body of Christ. The further question then is why he does not say so. Why does he write to the twelve tribes in the dispersion? Does he write to Israelites, or to believers? The answer is: to both. And both can be shown without difficulty.
This James was the leader of a congregation in Jerusalem that had all the characteristics of the Kingdom. The Kingdom was, at least in the first chapters of Acts, rightly preached. The fact remains that, if Israel (Judah), to whom the preaching was addressed first of all, had repented and accepted the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, that Messiah would indeed have returned.

> Acts 3:19–21
> 19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;
> 20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:
> 21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

The preaching was that Israel (Judah) should repent so that the Lord Jesus would return from heaven to reveal His Kingdom on earth. They preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. The expression “Body of Christ” does not appear at all; they did not know about it. It is hard to say when it was known, but in any case the apostle James does not write about it in this epistle.
The James who writes this letter is the one who is evidently the leader of a congregation that still has all the features of a Kingdom that is to be ruled from Jerusalem on the basis of Old Testament prophecy. It is a Kingdom that would first and foremost be preached in the synagogue. We must therefore simply acknowledge that in those days the Kingdom was being preached, while it only became clear later that they themselves belonged to that Kingdom—but then in its hidden form. They did not know that initially; they had to learn it afterwards. There is no contradiction: it completes the picture. It is a particular phase in the development of salvation history.
The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 can be explained only from this Kingdom perspective. People sold their possessions, the proceeds were distributed, and they lived from their common goods. These are features of the Kingdom. Those goods were administered by the apostles, especially Peter (Acts 5:3). They had all things common. They expected

the return of Christ, and they were occupied with the establishment of His Kingdom here on earth. They did not know any different, nor was it intended that they should know any different at that time. James, the lawful claimant to that throne, was therefore the one who, in a certain sense, was representing it and doing the honours.

The two and the ten tribes united

We actually learn that when someone comes to faith, he loses that earthly lineage, and shares in the life which is in Christ. In the Church there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Even if we were now to know believers from all twelve tribes of Israel, the letter still could not yet be delivered, because then the address would no longer be correct.

The letter can only be delivered after the conversion of the twelve tribes, for beforehand they are not believers, and the letter, as the contents show, is written to believers. When they come to faith, the Lord Jesus will return, and He will gather them together. Then the letter can be delivered. There is only a short period in which the letter can be delivered: the time between their conversion (= new birth) and their final regathering. That period is, as far as I am concerned, 33 years, because 33 years elapse between the conversion of Israel and the final establishment of the so-called “thousand years’ kingdom.”

We still expect the rapture of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Between the resurrection of Christ and this rapture lies the calling out of the Church from among the nations (Romans 11:25). After the rapture, history continues where it had paused in the days of James. There are then seven years until the conversion of Israel and the accompanying return of Christ upon the Mount of Olives. Those seven years are the 70th week of Daniel 9, which is divided into two equal halves of 3½ years, 42 months, or 1260 days each—namely, “a time, times, and half a time.” The first 3½ years are a time of peace, and the second 3½ years bring the great tribulation upon Israel. That period ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of Christ on the Mount of Olives.

At that moment the wrath over Israel is ended, but the wrath over the nations is not. That is the point again and again. When the Lord returns upon the Mount of Olives because Israel calls upon Him—for strictly speaking it is not even a matter of “coming to faith” in our sense—that is the day of the destruction of Jerusalem. That is certainly not the first day of the thousand years. The day on which the Lord sets His feet upon the Mount of Olives is the day on which the entire present Jewish state will have been destroyed. The truth is that the present Jewish nation must face its downfall, just as all human constructions must face their downfall. Jerusalem will be taken. The Lord Himself will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. Zechariah 14:2 has never yet been fulfilled. In Zechariah 14:4 we read that “his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives.” That too has not yet been fulfilled. This takes place at the end of that seventieth week, at the end of those seven years. Then a beginning is made with the restoration of Israel. For then they will call upon the Name of the Lord (Jehovah), and:

“…whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered.” (Joel 2:32)
That is only a small beginning, and at the same time it is the end of the present Jewish nation of the two tribes. After that, Jerusalem must first be destroyed before it can be rebuilt—but the temple not yet. The land will be colonised; it will once again become a Jewish nation. Roughly as it happened in the past under Zionism, so it will happen in the future under the leadership of the Messiah (Christ). It will actually be as in the days of the Judges.
In those days, what is written in Matthew 24:30 will come to pass. There it is said that the Lord will return, that every eye shall see Him, and that all the tribes of the land shall mourn over Him. Then He will send out His angels, and they will gather together His elect—all twelve tribes, of course—from the four winds (Matthew 24:31). Then it is said that this generation, which has seen all these things, shall not pass till all is fulfilled (Matthew 24:34), that is, until the summer is near.
The fig tree becomes tender again, its branch grows green, and its leaves put forth. It does not yet bear fruit, but it becomes alive. That is, of course, new birth. The “generation” sees the entire 70th week. That generation shall by no means pass till all these things are fulfilled—so a total of forty years. The “summer” which then follows is the so-called thousand years’ kingdom. That is a somewhat awkward expression, but I use it for convenience.
The thousand years do not begin with the return of Christ, but with the binding of Satan (Revelation 20:2). Christ reigns already long before that. In a certain sense He even reigns now, in hiddenness. In the future He will make His Kingdom openly manifest on earth. Only when that Kingdom is manifested—not only over Israel at the end of the 70th week, but also over the other nations 33 years later—will Satan be bound and those thousand years begin. Christ simply continues to reign, both before and after the thousand years, for He has an everlasting Kingdom.
In the 33 years between the coming of Christ upon the Mount of Olives and the moment when He shall be seated upon “the throne of his glory” (Matthew 25:31), 144,000 sealed ones from all twelve tribes of Israel will travel throughout the world to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all nations, before the end shall come (Matthew 24:14). The regathering of the two and the ten tribes together is complete at the beginning of the thousand years. It is evidently not intended to go any faster.
To those who, during those 33 years, are still in the dispersion, this epistle is written—by James, who himself belongs to the Church, but who also had everything to do with the establishment of that Kingdom. He was thus not dealing with the manifestation of the Kingdom, but with the hidden form of that Kingdom.
James himself was connected with the dispensation of the Law. He was born under it and lived under it, but has been redeemed from it, as Galatians says (Galatians 4:4–5). Those who were under the Law have been redeemed from it. James is the one who makes the link with the Kingdom which will indeed be revealed to Israel. That still lies in the future, because Israel in the past rejected the Messiah—and that was not

James's fault. The point is that this James forms the link between the past and the future.
In fact that is true of all the apostolic epistles—those of James, Peter, John, and Jude. The epistles of Peter are likewise addressed to strangers, to scattered Jews (at least the first epistle). In the case of the epistles of John that distinction is not as clear, but it is those epistles of John that explicitly speak of the antichrist—that word occurs only in those letters. From that we see that those epistles, too, have their primary application in the still future sixth dispensation. They point forward.
In studying the Epistle of James it is therefore of the greatest importance to realise that it is written in connection with the revelation of the Kingdom of Christ here on earth.
Many have had difficulties with the Epistle of James because it breathes a totally different atmosphere from, for example, the Pauline epistles. But there need be no difficulty, provided we know the period to which the epistle is to be applied. Insofar as the letter is addressed to believers, it is also addressed to us. That means that for us, at the very least, it has practical significance, a quite direct lesson. That does not alter the fact that the epistle becomes fully topical first and foremost in the coming—sixth—dispensation.

James 1:2
My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;
That was to be expected. The first real verse after the salutation already speaks of temptation, for these are the days of tribulation. In fact the whole epistle speaks of that temptation and tribulation into which the believer comes—something which appears to be a temptation from God. James says that it is not that, yet one must persevere to the end. Trust in the Lord. He is coming. It will all come out right, but you must remain faithful to that which has been promised.

James 1:3
Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.
This agrees with Romans 5, where it is said of us. The principle of testing remains the same: it works patience. It directs our gaze to the future, and therefore to the Lord. That is the case now, in this dispensation, but it will be of still greater importance in the next short dispensation. If we know now that in forty years everything will be put right, and that the believer who now endures will indeed enter that thousand years' kingdom, then it ought to be bearable. Forty years may be long, but we know what is at stake and Whom we have on our side. Such a situation forms the background of this Epistle of James. If we understand that, then in fact the greater part of the epistle is already explained.
The apostle says that he is speaking to those who are born again, who have been begotten through the Word of Truth, and who thereby have become firstfruits of His creatures. It is clearly a matter of firstfruits of a new creation.
The "divers temptations" in verse 2 are the hallmark of the time in which this epistle will be delivered. Such a statement can only be understood

when we know that temptations are precisely the characteristic of the time about which these things are written. It is never pleasant to fall into temptations, and it makes little sense to talk about them if the time has not yet come.
The brethren James has in view are brethren who fall into many temptations, and he tells them to count that all joy. However, nowhere does it say that we should strive to fall into great tribulations, as if that were some pleasant experience. But if we nonetheless fall into such temptations, then the apostle says:

James 1:2–4
My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;
3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.
4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.
The apostle therefore assumes that the testing contributes to the building up of the believer—or better: that the testing contributes to the demolition of the old man. Testing comes upon the old man. In reality, it is a test of whether and to what extent the new man in the believer has grown, or has reached maturity—how far the life of Christ has become manifest in him. That is the purpose of temptations.
Hence it says that we are to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations. It is not in itself great joy, which is why he says we must reckon it as great joy. That is the special thing about a believer. A believer is “saved by hope” (Romans 8:24). Faith is “the substance of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1). A believer is oriented toward the future. The Lord has taken away the past. We have no past—we have a future. The world has a past, generally lives in the past, and does its utmost to preserve the past. A believer has been delivered from the old man, from sin, and in a certain sense from earthly descent—from Adamic origin—and has become a child of God. A believer has his gaze fixed on the future. The great tribulation is still to come—though not upon us, as is well known. That tribulation lies in the future, but even for those who are in that tribulation it must be clear that its sole purpose is to bring and to reveal the long-awaited Kingdom of the Messiah here on earth.
In that future dispensation we have, on the one hand, the tribulation which comes upon all mankind—tribulation which mankind in a certain sense also brings upon itself, as is also said here in James 1. On the other hand, we have the preaching of the Gospel—first and foremost by Israelites, especially by the 144,000, but in any case by Israel. In that time the announcement of the Kingdom takes place, and the building up of that Kingdom. The tribulation which that same person undergoes points to the transience and corruptibility of the old man, so that he should not set his hope upon that. At the same time, an alternative is offered to him: the coming of the coming King and of the coming Kingdom.

James 1:3
Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

This tells us that temptation can be interpreted as “the trying of your faith.” Instead of “temptation,” that phrase is now used. From this it follows that such temptation is nothing other than a testing of someone’s faith. That is how it is, for temptation is connected with faith. Temptation concerns tribulation, but also temptation in the sense of enticement. Both play a role in that sixth dispensation.

There is enticement because of that false prophet—the antichrist—who, “if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24). That is also taken up in Revelation 13. Thus tribulation and deception go hand in hand there. They are regarded here by the apostle James as a testing of faith. People are compelled to make a deliberate choice.

In those days there is also the famous matter of the mark of the beast, which one must bear in order to be able to buy and sell. On the other hand there are the 144,000 who bear the mark of the Son of man. They too are sealed on their foreheads, but they do not bear the mark of the beast. It is black and white. A choice must decidedly be made, and testing always has as its outcome that a choice is made.

If someone’s faith is not genuine, that will be revealed at once when he falls into testing. Indeed, in the Epistle to the Corinthians it is pointed out that such testings, and even divisions within the church, are necessary, in order that the approved may be made manifest—that it might become clear who the good are and who not; who truly believes and who does not.

I sometimes think that one of the things that tells against Christianity today is that there is so little persecution. It has been made so easy for people simply to join in and go along. Today there is no end of things that call themselves “Christian.” One could almost be ashamed to be named in the same list. Many things are called Christian that have absolutely nothing to do with Christ. If there were more persecution, I sometimes think, this would not be the case, because it would cost much more to be a Christian—at least, to be an openly confessing Christian.

Not that I now wish for persecutions—quite the opposite. I am thankful for the great freedom we have. But we must keep our eyes open to the danger connected with it, namely that “false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 2:4). That happens today as well. People often strongly oppose liberty. That is because they do not truly believe. They do not believe that Christ has made us free from everything from which we could possibly be made free.

When tribulation or persecution comes, it has at least this purpose: the testing of our faith. It reveals whether we truly are believers. That is one of the important themes in this Epistle of James: whether our faith proves to be real, whether we truly are genuine believers.

“Patience” is related to endurance. It is something like patience in an unpleasant situation. You need patience when you have come into difficult circumstances which you actually know are only temporary. You simply wait it out. That is patience, or endurance. The word contains “suffering”: one must be willing to suffer. You can translate it as “patience,” but then we may lose some of the meaning, for it is indeed patience in the sense of

waiting it out. We endure things, but we know that there will be an end to them. That is also said in the verses that follow.

Many temptations

I want first to dwell for a moment on verse 2, because of those “divers temptations” that are mentioned there. A few Scripture references are cited below, and it is good to look them up. Matthew 5:11 is mentioned first. That passage speaks especially of the persecutions that believers suffer. This verse is part of the Sermon on the Mount, in which the Lord Jesus announces the Kingdom and also sets out the nature and laws of that Kingdom. The Epistle of James corresponds in its contents very closely to the Sermon on the Mount, as this comparison of Scriptures shows.

> Matthew 5:10–11
> 10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
> 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

This Sermon on the Mount, too, will receive its full topical meaning in the next dispensation—that same dispensation in which also the Epistle of James will be delivered. Although it contains principles that are universal and that have always applied to believers, it will then receive its full, very direct and concrete, even literal and physical significance in connection with that sixth dispensation. For then it is literally about entering into the Kingdom, even here on earth. It then says that those who will enter are those who are persecuted for it—those days of tribulation.

Verse 11 is of course addressed to believers. Opponents aim to bring those who preach the truth—the Word of God—into disrepute, and they do not shy away from lies to do it. They invent things in order to blacken believers and put them in a bad light. From practical experience I know that people are constantly trying to find something, just as they followed the Lord Jesus in order to see what He might do wrong. They looked for an occasion, and that still happens. If they do not find such an occasion, they simply lie. That is also what it says here: that they “shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” It is, of course, not that someone is blessed merely because people speak evil of him. The point is that evil is spoken about us for **His** sake, because of the testimony we bear. It is done in order to discredit the message that is preached. We are told: pay no attention to it, for blessed are ye when it happens.

(Verse 12 will be discussed in the following part.)

> Matthew 5:12
> Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Afterwards it turns out that in the Old Testament and in the Gospels it went in exactly the same way. Here in the Gospels we are pointed back to the Old Testament. The prophets of the Old Testament were also slandered, because they spoke the truth. They said, “Thus hath God spoken,” or, “It is written,” or, “Thus saith the LORD.” And that was counted against them.

So we know what, as believers, we may expect. It happened to the Lord Himself. It happens also in our days. And it will likewise happen in the coming dispensation. As soon as the Word of God is brought to the table, people do not know what to invent next in order to bring that Word of God into discredit. We, and they in the coming dispensation, are therefore warned.

> Matthew 5:11–12
> 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
> 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven…

That is the same as that inheritance which is “reserved in heaven for us.” There we receive our reward. That links very closely with “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2).
Romans 5 connects even more strongly with this. The Epistle to the Romans speaks, generally, about the way of salvation—especially about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ—and that His death and resurrection, His new birth from among the dead, form at once the basis for the new birth of believers, regardless of in which dispensation they live.
In Romans 5:1–2 it says that the believer is justified by faith, has peace with God, and stands in grace.

> Romans 5:3–5
> 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
> 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
> 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

This is exactly what James also said. The trying of your faith—tribulation, temptation—works patience. “Experience” is proven character, triedness. That testing or tribulation ultimately works, through patience and proven character, hope in us, so that we fix our gaze on the future.
Also in the Epistle of James a short time is in view. That period lasts at most **33 years**. So it falls well within a single generation. Compared with a human life it is a considerable span, but still manageable. When you stand before it, 33 years seems a long way; but looking back, 33 years is not that far. This also fits particularly well with, for example, Romans 8, where the suffering of the believer is spoken of.

> Romans 8:17
> And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

James said that God, “of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18). That is the very point here as well. We are children of God. Then it says that on that basis we are heirs. The apostle Paul therefore considers it self-evident that the believer suffers, in order that he might also be glorified with Christ.

The suffering of the believer is the same suffering that came upon the believing Jesus of Nazareth. It therefore comes upon all believers. He who thus suffered is seated at the right hand of God. That means that we who suffer for the same reason—because of faith—shall also be glorified together with Him, and with Him receive that **sonship** (Romans 8:15, 23).

> Romans 8:18
> For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

That is the well-known principle that the path to glory necessarily goes via suffering, via humiliation. I read that here in Romans 8, but you could place, for example, the whole Epistle to the Philippians alongside it, for that is its very theme.

> Philippians 2:5–9
> 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
> 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
> 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
> 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
> 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

“Highly exalted” = exalted to the uttermost. And rightly so, because He first humbled Himself. Because He first suffered, He was thereafter exalted. Think of Job and of Joseph. There are many more examples, though less striking.

This is the way that God goes with man—in the first place with the Man Christ Jesus, but thereafter also with every believer. It is a way that leads through suffering to glory. That means that the glory which shall be revealed in us is proportional to the suffering which we undergo in this world.

Hence: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” Over against that testing stands the future reward. That is also the case in Revelation 20:4. There the martyrs from the great tribulation are spoken of, who were beheaded for their testimony. They will be raised, and they will reign with Christ during the thousand years. There is, then, a special reward for those who have suffered in a special way.

The Epistle to the Hebrews also speaks about that suffering and those tribulations—especially about the suffering of believers.

> Hebrews 12:1–2
> **1** Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,
> 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

“Patience” (endurance) is the key word. He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God because He endured the cross and despised the shame.

Therefore we are told to look unto Him—unto Him who endured the cross and despised the shame. Look at Him. He is seated at the right hand of God. That is what God does with the one who suffers for Him, or in His Name.

Thus we read again:

> Hebrews 12:1
> …and let us run with patience the race that is set before us;

There is Another who also ran a race that was set before Him—Jesus—who, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,” and is now “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” If we suffer here, we may expect that we shall sit with Him at the right hand of God.

> Hebrews 12:3
> For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

We are simply told that we should expect the same things as the Lord, and that we ought to remain steadfast in them. Then, in verse 5, a word of comfort is added:

> Hebrews 12:5–7
> 5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:
> 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.
> 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons…

Verse 5 is cited from Proverbs (and recalls also Job). If we endure chastening—suffering—then God deals with us as with sons, that is, as heirs.

We read again:

> Romans 8:17
> And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

That is repeated here. Then it is said that those who do **not** suffer are bastards—not sons, not heirs. They are not subjected to tribulation. Those who do find themselves in suffering are precisely the sons. That is simply a general principle of Scripture.

In 1 Peter 1 we find exactly the same truths.

1 Peter 1:3 says that “God… according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope”. We have become children. We are, as James put it, begotten of his own will with the word of truth (James 1:18).

> 1 Peter 1:4
> To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

For “great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12). That reward, too, has to do with the suffering we undergo here.

> 1 Peter 1:5–7

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:
7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

We rejoice in the power of God. This is almost word for word the same as the opening of the Epistle of James. But we find the same things with the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, and with the apostle Paul, especially in Romans, Philippians, and—if you ask me—also in Hebrews.

It is, then, a general truth that temptation works patience, and that the suffering which the believer undergoes will in the future be rewarded in the form of glory which we shall then display. When we are manifested before the judgement seat of Christ, we shall, where appropriate, receive reward for the things done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Whoever's body is used by the Lord must expect suffering. These things belong together; they are normal. When a believer is rewarded for what the Lord does through him, and when a believer is rewarded for the suffering he has borne for His Name's sake, that means that a servant of God must be willing to suffer in this world. Every believer is a servant of God. We all "do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). We serve under the New Covenant; we are in God's service, and therefore servants of God. What God does through us has as its consequence that we have reward in heaven; and it also has as its consequence that we suffer here on earth.

Hence Scripture says that whoever leaves something here for His sake will receive it again in the future—in eternal life. If we realise these things and speak of them in this way, then it is not so difficult to understand what James really says in James 1:2. For then our reward shall indeed be great in heaven. If we are believers, that is an argument to which we attach great weight. If we are believers, we expect that heaven; we expect an eternal future in heaven. Then it is our hope that we shall indeed receive reward there.

James 1:3–4

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.
4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

That patience we already saw in Romans, in 1 Peter, and in Hebrews. Verse 4 is a somewhat difficult verse and it sounds a little odd. In the KJV, the word "perfect" always means mature, fully grown. What is perfect has reached its full development. It has passed through the appointed process of growth. It is the same word as for "adult".

"Let patience have her perfect work" means that this patience is to be maintained right to the end, so that we may be patient unto the end. If you compare other translations, you will find that made explicit: that patience must "work on unto the end."

This sounds a little unusual in our present dispensation, though you could take “unto the end” to mean “until our earthly course has been finished.” It receives, however, a fuller meaning in the time to which this epistle primarily refers. “Unto the end” then means: unto the end of those 33 years. The end of those 33 years is, of course, the end of the “day of wrath”—as Scripture officially calls it. I deliberately say “33 years” so that you see that there is a clearly appointed end-point in time. That is fixed with the Lord.

That patience having its perfect work therefore means: that patience working on until the end. With this we immediately link up with Matthew 24 and 25, which contain the discourse on the last things. The English sometimes call it the “second Sermon on the Mount.” There the Lord speaks of all that will happen before the Kingdom of Christ is established on earth. Among other things He says:

> Matthew 24:13
> But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

That is perfect patience—completed, full-grown endurance. We have already seen that this “being saved” is entering into the Kingdom—entering into the thousand years.

“Let patience have her perfect work” therefore means: endure unto the end in order to be saved. This has, first and foremost, its application in the coming dispensation.

“That ye may be perfect” = “that ye may be fully grown.” Not only is that patience then full-grown, but the patient believer himself is full-grown. Not only has the period reached its destined end, but the believer also has reached his destined maturity.

Whoever endures unto the end of the present evil age—for that is what Matthew 24 is about—comes himself to that end. That patience comes to an end, but the believer also comes to the end, for so it is written. Patience is then perfect; and the believer, too, is perfect—full-grown.

James 1:4

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

In English there are two words, but in the original there is just one. That word occurs only twice as an adjective: here, and in 1 Thessalonians 5.

> 1 Thessalonians 5:23
> And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Wholly” is exactly the same expression as in James 1:4, where it is said that we may be “entire”. These are the only two places where the term is used as an adjective. It occurs once more as a noun in Acts 3, where the meaning is very clear, though there it is translated quite differently.

The author then links back again to Hebrews 12 (which we have already quoted), and applies the same principle: whoever endures chastening is treated by God as a son, that is, as an heir, destined to receive a crown—to share in royal authority in the eternal Kingdom of Christ. He ties this also to the parables of the pounds and the talents, where faithful servants

receive authority over cities as reward (Luke 19; Matthew 25). The crown is thus seen as a share in Christ's royal rule.
And all of this flows back to James's simple but weighty sentence:
"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;
Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:2–3)
Because behind that "trying" stands a sure promise of heavenly reward and of future glory with Christ.

> Revelation 3:12
> Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, …

A pillar bears weight. A proper pillar has a capital at the top – a crown. That is how it ought to be. A pillar carries responsibility, rule, and therefore a crown. That decorative capital at the top is there for beauty, but it is typology. Of certain apostles it is said that they were reputed to be pillars in the church (Galatians 2:9). The temple is, of course, the designation of the Church.
Then we come to Revelation 4:4.

> Revelation 4:4
> And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

The twenty-four elders are the representation of the Church, of the believers of this present dispensation. They are elders, for they are the firstborn. They are firstfruits and therefore elders. They are written in heaven (Hebrews 12:23). Hence they are seen here in heaven. They sit on thrones. That is also what was promised to the Church.
Moreover, twenty-four is twice twelve. Twelve is the number of rule. With 2 × 12 you naturally arrive at rule also in the unseen world. Twenty-four is rule not only on earth but also in heaven. It is therefore doubled rule.
In Kings and Chronicles it is recorded that David, at the beginning of his reign, divided the priests into twenty-four courses (1 Chronicles 24). That had not been so before. Previously they were simply "the priests". David divided them into twenty-four, so that the priests are indicated in twenty-four categories. There the number is therefore connected with the priests. But the priests under the Old Testament are a picture of the priests under the New Testament. In the New Testament the Priest is Priest "after the order of Melchisedec". That means that He also wears a crown. He is also King, and then it is indeed again twenty-four.
The twenty-four elders wear crowns, for they exercise rule. That does not mean that the Church consists of only twenty-four persons. This is typology. It is a picture, just as one woman in the vision of Revelation 12 is a picture of the whole people of Israel. When twenty-four elders are seen here, that likewise is a picture of a whole people, namely of the Church. In any case they are crowned, for the Church is an assembly of firstfruits, of firstborn ones. To be firstborn is a right. The birthright includes inheriting the crown or possibly the throne. Both are mentioned here. They sat on twenty-four thrones and they also had crowns.
Strikingly, they cast these crowns to the ground.

> Revelation 4:10
> The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne…

Whenever you encounter the twenty-four elders in Revelation, they are doing precisely what the Church is called to do. They never do anything else than fall on their knees and worship. This is the best proof that they represent the Church, for the Church is called for His Name, to the glory of His Name, to glorify Him, to worship Him. Moreover, we as the Church are ourselves the reward of Christ and are therefore specially destined for Him. Hence those twenty-four elders.

They have crowns, but they lay them at His feet and say:

> Revelation 4:11
> Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power…
> That is perfectly clear. Is there then, after all, something to be earned for a believer? Yes indeed; but that merit is produced by the work of Christ in the believer.

2 Corinthians 5 says that there is reward for that which has been done through the body; not for what has been done by the body, but for what has been done through it. That is to say, the body of a believer is at most, in the most favourable case, an instrument, a tool, which the Lord uses. Therefore the reward for the work that happens through that body – that tool – is also destined for the One who wields that body.

If we then receive reward because our bodies have done something, we can lay the crown back at His feet and say, “Thou art worthy to receive…”. That is of course a symbolic act. It is all of grace that we receive. Therefore we point back to the Lord and say, “Not I, but Christ.” To Him the honour is given. So it is written. They cast their crowns before the throne.

After that, a crown is mentioned only once more, and that is in Revelation 14.

> Revelation 14:14
> And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man…

That is not difficult, for already the white cloud is clear enough. On the cloud upon which the Lord ascended, He shall return. In the Old Testament the cloud is always the expression of the glory of the LORD. The cloud is a picture of the heavenly position of the Lord.

When the Lord appears in glory it is, of course, on the clouds of heaven and with a cloud. When the tribulation comes, a day of darkness and gloominess, it is also called “a day of clouds” (Joel 2:2), for it is the glory of the LORD that is revealed here on earth. That even goes together with tribulation down here. That is the cloud.

Also when Ezekiel sees the well-known glory of the LORD—that remarkable vehicle with all those wheels—clouds are mentioned (Ezekiel 1:4, 28; 10:3–4).

A very beautiful account is that of the pillar of cloud which was originally in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Ezekiel then sees the cloud depart from Jerusalem. It is written that, before it departs altogether, that

cloud rests upon the mountain that lies on the east side of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 11:23). No name is given for that mountain, but it can only be one: the Mount of Olives.

So the pillar of cloud departs. The Lord withdraws from Israel in the days at the beginning of the captivity, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem. Before Jerusalem is destroyed, the pillar of cloud departs from the temple and from Jerusalem, and it pauses for a moment on the Mount of Olives before disappearing into heaven. That is the story. There the Lord, in type, first departs from Jerusalem and then from the Mount of Olives into heaven, and afterwards—some years later—Jerusalem is destroyed.

That is repeated in the days of Acts, when the Lord went out from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. From the Mount of Olives He ascended into heaven, and some years later Jerusalem was destroyed. The cloud, the pillar of cloud, is a picture of the glory of the LORD and thereby of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah Himself.

The first time the Mount of Olives is mentioned is in connection with this occasion when the pillar of cloud departs. The second time the Mount of Olives is mentioned, the prophet reports that the Lord shall return upon the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). Thereafter the Mount of Olives has a role in the histories of the Lord Jesus during His earthly walk. All within that same framework: the ascension and the return of Christ.

> Revelation 14:14
> And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

If He is “like unto the Son of man”, then He is the Son of man, for there is only one. The Son of man is the Heir of Adam—that is what it means—and there is but one. Here, then, the Lord Jesus is seen upon the cloud.

This golden crown is the crown of life. Gold is a picture of eternal life. Here it is called a golden crown. Gold stands for incorruptibility, so it is indeed an unfading crown. A crown is of gold; so it ought to be. A crown must be eternal, and therefore it must be a golden crown.

The sickle speaks of the judgement that comes upon the earth, but the crown speaks of the eternal Kingship which this Son of man has received, because He has fought the good fight and kept the faith; for that reason “there is laid up for him a crown of life, a crown of righteousness, an unfading crown” (compare 2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Who is His crown? We are, for example; for all that applied to Paul in this connection applies in a much higher sense to Christ. Hence those expressions in Philippians and Ephesians:

> “Be ye therefore followers of God” (Ephesians 5:1),
> “Brethren, be followers together of me” (Philippians 3:17),

for He is the One who has gone that way. The Epistle to the Hebrews, of course, also speaks in that same way (Hebrews 6:12). He went the same way right through the trials. We likewise follow Him and go the same road, possibly also right through the trials.

What is the profit of Christ for a believer? That when he receives Him, he receives eternal life. The next point then is: what is the profit of the living

Christ now for the believer? That profit is expressed in Philippians 3 with a special word, and it concerns the life of Christ which now ought to be lived in us.
God's purpose with man is formulated right at the creation of man. God would make man "in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). When someone is born again, he thereby becomes fit to be made conformable to the image of God's Son, to be made conformable to God's image (Romans 8:29). The intention is that we are born again in order then to be able to be transformed into His image. New birth is not the end of the process, but the beginning. Only after new birth is one fit to begin to answer to God's purpose, to bear fruit.
Hence that parable of the pounds. They were servants, but the purpose of those servants was that they should gain something, that there should be fruit, that there should be "profits". Bearing fruit is the purpose of our life. Paul says: "I count all things but loss… that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:8).
Was Paul then not yet dead and buried with Christ? Yes indeed; that is the fundamental truth. But he is not speaking now about that fundamental truth; he is speaking about the outworking of that truth in practical life. Principles are there to be practically applied, to be worked out.
The principle that a believer is dead and buried with Christ is meant to be worked out in life, and thus in conduct, in the running of the race. In this Epistle to the Philippians it is about the walk of the believer, about the practical outworking of the life of Christ. That is therefore called by a different word: "the out-resurrection from among the dead" (Philippians 3:11). That is resurrection out of the dead and then again "out" in practical life. It is once: risen with Christ; and then again, in connection with the walk. Of this he says:

> Philippians 3:12
> Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Of the resurrection from the dead he already had a share. "Perfect" = mature, fully grown. The Lord seized Paul in order that he might run that race which the Lord set before him. Of that Paul says that he has not yet attained it (the finish, the goal).

> Philippians 3:13–14
> 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,
> 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Forgetting the things which are behind spares us many problems. A sinner, a natural man, is someone with a past. He has a great deal behind him, and accumulates ever more behind him. He has to drag that around with him. We have laid that aside at the cross. We do not have a past; we have a future. Therefore we forget what lies behind.
The "mark" is the target, the end point. Paul has just said that he was called or seized to run that race. In Galatians he says he was called to

suffer. The Lord would show him how great things he must suffer for His Name's sake (Acts 9:16). Paul calls it something else here. He says: It may be suffering, but the point is that I receive a crown for that suffering. I therefore press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. The prize is from above, and the calling is also from above. He has been seized from above—from heaven itself, we might say. He is "called from above", and calling in the Bible is always a calling unto sonship. It is never a calling to an office or to a place on the mission field. Paul is called unto sonship, unto inheritance, that is, unto a crown. He calls that the prize of the calling of God; a prize which is from above, because the calling is from above.
We press toward an incorruptible crown. That is the rule according to which I live, says Paul. It is the rule destined for all believers.

Philippians 3:17
Brethren, be followers together of me…

And then in the KJV we read in:

Philippians 3:20
For our conversation is in heaven…

James 1:17
Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights…
The son is the one who inherits, the heir. He of course inherits from the father, so that the father is the one who gives, or at least distributes, his inheritance. Of Tubal-cain it is said that he was "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (Genesis 4:22) – we might say: the father of all smiths. Jubal is "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (Genesis 4:21). That does not mean that every musician physically descends from Jubal; it simply means that he handed his craft, his inventions, down to those who are then called his sons.
Thus Scripture knows "the sons of the prophets". Not because they had so many children, but because they were their pupils and learned the "trade" from them. It is a little irreverent to call it a trade, but the terms "father" and "son" are also used for the relationship between teacher and disciple. It is exactly the same, for the son shares in the possessions of the father. God is here called the Father of lights. That means that all lights come from God. That is one side. The other is that God, being the Father, gives His blessings, His qualities, to all who are "lights". Of the Lord Jesus it is said that He is "The everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6). That does not mean that He gives something to eternity, but that He gives eternity to others. So it is here: God is the Father of lights, and God gives perfect gifts. Those gifts are light and are eternal life. Eternal life is the life of Christ, and He is the Light. Light and life are synonymous ideas. Think of John 1:4. There light and life are named in one breath. The Epistles of John also begin with these two expressions.
Light brings things to light and communicates; it enters into fellowship and creates a link. Life is exactly the same; life is the establishing of a connection. Death is then separation. Light and life therefore belong together. If it is written here that God is the Father of lights, then God is

also the Father of eternal life. That belongs together, as appears from the following verse.

James 1:18
Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.
This is, of course, about new birth. Verse 17 says: “God is the Father of lights”, but verse 18 says: “God begat us.” From this it follows that we are that light. When we have received the ministry of the Word and thus the Word of God, it means that God has revealed Himself to us through His Word – and that Word is light.
“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105)
God is the Father of lights. He therefore gives lights. With Him there is no change, no turning. With Him the light is not bent aside, so no shadow can arise. Hence we walk in the light. That immediately connects with the Epistles of John.
One Epistle of James, two of Peter, three of John and one of Jude belong first and foremost to the next dispensation. These apostolic letters belong together.
“His will” in James 1:18 is the will of the Eternal, the Unchangeable. Now perhaps you understand why a Jew does not pronounce the Name Jehovah, but replaces it with “the Eternal”. He does not pronounce it, yet he must say something, so he says “the Eternal”, for that is more or less the translation of the Name Jehovah: “I AM THAT I AM … I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE.”
That the Father of lights has begotten us of His own will means that He has done it as He Himself willed. He has simply carried out His plan. He has done it according to His counsel and as He determined it – according to His plan.
“Creatures” here obviously refers to a new creation. That connects directly to the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:10, where Paul says that we are His workmanship. The English translators have “handiwork”. We are the work of His hands.

> Ephesians 2:10
> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

It does not say “created in Adam”, but “created in Christ Jesus”. So it is not about the old creation, but about a new creation. That is evident from the preceding verses, where it is said that
“God… hath quickened us together with Christ … and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5–6).
That is about new birth. Through that resurrection and ascension with Christ we have become a new creation in Christ; therefore we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. Then we read: “unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”
The point is that every believer in this dispensation – but also in the next – is born again through faith, a new creation in Christ, and therefore

appointed unto good works. A creation exists in order to do something. God makes a world and He has a purpose with it. There are good works which God has prepared and which in some way or other must be done. These good works in Ephesians 2 concern the Church as the Body of Christ. The Epistle of James also speaks of these good works, but not directly in connection with the present dispensation; rather, directly and in the first place, in connection with the revelation of the Kingdom.
Paul says that a believer is a new creature in Christ, unto good works which He has prepared that he should walk in them. The apostle James says something similar in:

James 1:19
Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
“Let every man be swift” – that is, quick – “to hear”; to hear the Word of God, of course. Speaking is here contrasted with hearing. God does not expect a man to speak, but to listen. It is not man who speaks, but God. Samuel said: “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.” (1 Samuel 3:9–10) A servant of the Lord does not speak first; he listens. From God the Word goes forth, and the Word is power, the Word is life, the Word is light; therefore God is the One who speaks, and we are those who receive from God.
Therefore we must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath. The righteousness of God is not produced by man speaking in anger; the righteousness of God comes from faith and thus from hearing.
“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17)

We have sprung from the Word, or been brought forth by the Word. That means that we should indeed at all times be ready to listen to that Word. This is a simple truth: that we should continue in what was originally given to us – or better – that we should continue in what we originally accepted. It is the same truth as in the Epistle to the Galatians, where it is stated in slightly different words. There we are told that the believer must remain with the Spirit. He began with the Spirit; he is expected also to be perfected with the Spirit, and not with the flesh (Galatians 3:3). He must stay with the things originally handed down to him and taught him from the Word of God. That is what this passage says.
The apostle James warns us not to react too hastily, not to demolish things beforehand, not to have our judgement ready in advance because what we hear does not happen to fit our patterns of thought. James is really saying: Now wait a bit, for our patterns of thought might be wrong. Often people hear something, immediately pronounce upon it, and judge in accordance with that opinion. We should not be too quick to do that. Man is by nature an “empty vessel” and must be filled. He is not meant to produce something, but to receive something. He must be filled with all the fulness of God, with the Word of God. He must be filled with the Holy Spirit, with Christ. He must drink of the living water or eat of the bread of

life. It all comes to exactly the same thing. It does not befit man to be so quick to speak.

James 1:19
…let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
He is therefore also slow to pronounce a condemnatory judgement. Wrath has to do with judging. “Slow to speak” and “slow to wrath” together mean that one is slow to condemn something. That is right, for we often do not know the motives. We do not know the background. Often it is better not to interfere at all.
In any case, as a comfort, we read:

James 1:20
For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.
“Worketh” is “produces” or “brings about”. Man’s wrath does not bring forth the righteousness of God. God’s righteousness stands firm regardless, even without our pronouncements. God’s righteousness is anchored in His Person and is revealed in the Gospel.

> Romans 1:16–17
> 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.
> 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

The righteousness of God is settled there. Therefore it makes little sense to get angry about everything that displeases us and which, perhaps rightly, we condemn. It is far more profitable to set the Gospel before someone, for that does work God’s righteousness. That serves righteousness, whereas our anger at all that is wrong usually achieves little.
A believer is not called to fight all wrong things, but to **do** the right things. That is what the next section is about, and especially James 2. If we fought all unrighteousness, nothing would be left. We would still be nowhere, for the point is not that unrighteousness disappears; the point is that righteousness should come into being, be revealed, be done.
That is a major, elementary Biblical truth. “Wherefore be… slow to wrath.” It does not say that we may never be angry; sometimes it is necessary. But generally we are to be slow in that.

James 1:21
Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.
The phrase “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21) is being explained as practical, present salvation in a believer’s life, not “getting eternal life.”

- “Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” means the believer is to put off / cut ties with sin in himself (not rage at the world’s sin). It’s like Paul’s “mortify” / “put off” language in Colossians 3—breaking the connection rather than “fighting” it as if it were still alive.

- “Receive with meekness the engrafted word” means humbly accepting the Word already planted in the believer, letting it take root and shape the heart and conduct—moving from being merely a hearer to being a doer.
- “
- Able to save your souls” is taken to mean the Word can deliver the believer’s soul-life (the old, natural life expressed in daily walk) from the power and patterns of sin, producing a transformed life and (in this view) relating to reward and endurance in the believer’s earthly walk, not questioning whether the believer is eternally saved by grace.

In short: put off corrupt habits, receive God’s Word humbly, and the Word will rescue and reshape your lived, day-to-day life (“soul”) into obedient, fruitful walking—especially under pressure.

Two things are contrasted here: on the one hand laying aside all filthiness and excess of wickedness; and on the other receiving, with meekness, the Word of God which is planted in the believer. That, of course, happens through hearing. Therefore: “Be swift to hear” – but first: having laid aside all filthiness and excess of wickedness.
The point is that the believer is not called to combat all filthiness and excess of wickedness in the world and to be angry about it, but it is true that the believer is expected to lay aside filthiness and excess of wickedness in himself. He cannot do that one hundred percent, but one can go quite a long way. If that were not so, it would not be written. The point is that we should put these things off, lay them aside.
This is an expression that also appears in Colossians 3, though there three different terms are used to express the same truth.

> Colossians 3:5–6
> 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:
> 6 For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

Instead of “children” it actually says “sons” – heirs. This concerns the world.

> Romans 1:18
> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

The wrath of God comes upon the world. The world lies under the wrath and judgement of God, and “he that believeth not is condemned already” (John 3:18).
Here we read that the believer mortifies his members which are upon the earth. The believer lays them aside. To mortify means that the connection is broken. Death is separation; there is no longer communication. The link is cut.
That also means that it is not being “fought”, for something is fought only as long as it is considered alive. Fighting something is also a form of communication. There is mutual activity; there is a kind of fellowship. Whether you are calmly talking or fiercely quarrelling, in both cases there is communication – dialogue.

To mortify means: no more communication with it; therefore it is not about “combating”, but about laying aside.
What in Colossians 3:5 is called “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth”, is called in:

> Colossians 3:8–9
> 8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.
> 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

In verse 5 it is called mortifying; in verse 8 it is called putting off. That is the same expression as in James 1:21. Mortifying, putting off or putting off the old man – it is all the same thing. These are three different terms for the same reality. The thrust in all three is that the connections are broken. That is what a man can do: break his connections with these things.
That is what James 1 emphasises. It is striking that with Paul you often find a list of particular sins, whereas James deals with it relatively briefly and generally summarises it as sins of the tongue – because people do not control the tongue, the word.
Where filthiness and excess of wickedness have not been laid aside, the Word of God will not be received with meekness. It will always go along with strife, because the effect of the Word of God is precisely that filthiness and excess of wickedness are laid aside. Where the Word of God appears, sin must retreat; therefore conflict arises.
Only when one truly has laid aside this filthiness and excess of wickedness is one able to receive the Word of God with meekness. A believer trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour and no longer in his own strength. He exchanges his own strength for the power of God.
The Word must enter the heart. It must become part of the believer’s life. We call that conversion. James alludes to that event. Therefore he also says:

James 1:22
But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, …
It does not say “be doers only”, but “be doers of the Word”, and that after one has first become a hearer of the Word.
A hearer of the Word is not merely someone who hears it and forgets it, but someone who accepts it and acknowledges it as the truth. That is an intellectual, mental matter. But the intention is most certainly that it should have effect in a person’s life.
James is concerned with that all through the letter. Paul also speaks of this outworking in:

> Colossians 3:10
> And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

One is renewed unto knowledge by receiving the Word of God with meekness. He gains that knowledge from the Word of God.
The phrase “which is able to save your souls” in James 1:21 can be understood in light of the dispensations. Suddenly we read of souls being saved. The soul is the designation of the old, natural man. James is

speaking about that, not about whether a believer is eternally saved or not. He is speaking about the walk of the believer during his stay here on earth. He is speaking of salvation in connection with this present life.
Paul says the same in:

> Philippians 2:12
> …work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Which salvation? Not that of the spirit, but of the soul, as the context shows. Obviously so, for eternal life we ourselves cannot work out. That is received by grace. Scripture says that often and clearly. Here it is about salvation in connection with reward for the walk here on earth. It is the salvation of the soul.
The simple Biblical principle is that all saving truths are both future and present. They already are so, and yet they will still come. That twofold character is always there. We have redemption, and yet Scripture speaks of a future redemption. That redemption is destined for those who are already redeemed. That is no nonsense; it simply concerns two different things that stand in line with each other. They belong together. The one is an anticipation of the other.
We are already redeemed, but we still have to be redeemed. We already have eternal life, and yet we are in a mortal body. The latter will happen at the earliest at the rapture of the Church.

We have already received salvation, and there is a salvation still to be obtained in the future. That is pointed out repeatedly. One is blessed, but the intention is that also the walk should be blessed.
Another example we find in Philippians:

> Philippians 3:8–10
> 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,
> 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:
> 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection…

He must know Him, and he must know the power of His resurrection. That is the same thing, for He is the One who is risen from the dead. It is about the resurrection power which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand (Ephesians 1:19–20).
“That I may know him” – for he must be renewed unto knowledge.

> Philippians 3:10
> That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

We had thought that the Lord suffered and died in our place, for us, and now it says that we are to be made conformable unto His death. We had thought that the Lord was raised for us, and now it says:

> Philippians 3:11
> If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Has he then not already received that?

Philippians 3:12–14
12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.
13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do,
14 Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,
I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The point, of course, is that it is about different things. On the one hand, we have already died and been buried with Christ, been raised with Him, and, moreover, have ascended with Him into heaven. That lies in the past, and that is therefore our position now.
However, the intention is that this principle, this position of the believer, should also have a practical outworking in his walk, or simply in his life. Being raised with Christ only has meaning if it has practical consequences in our lives. That is also what stands in the epistle to the Ephesians. There it is said in one breath that we are raised with Him and seated with Him in the heavenlies, and why He has done that.

Ephesians 2:7, 10
7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

So it says that the heavenly position is the starting point for our walk. Moreover, Hebrews says the same things. There we read that the Lord, our High Priest at the right hand of God, has purged our consciences from dead works, in order that we should serve the living God.

Hebrews 9:14
How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The blood of Christ is the life of Christ. The living Christ purges our conscience from dead works. That cleansing, that redemption which has become our portion, therefore has as its purpose that we should serve the living God.
In this connection a comparison is fitting between the position of the believer and the position of Israel in the wilderness. An Israelite who had been redeemed no longer belonged to Egypt, but he did belong to Canaan. He was already redeemed out of Egypt, but he had not yet received the full blessings. He did receive an advance, an earnest of the inheritance to come. The Lord cares for His own, whether they are in Canaan or in the wilderness. It is only awkward if you do not like manna. You must not be too choosy, but learn to eat what is set before you. A believer must do the same. There is no varied menu. It is all manna – a great many different little grains, but it always comes to the same thing. So it is with our spiritual food. It is always about Christ who conquered death.

It is therefore essential that the position of the believer should also be worked out in practical life. That is true now, and it will be true in the coming dispensation as well. In that coming dispensation, of which James is primarily speaking in his epistle, this is of even greater importance, because that whole dispensation has an earthly future expectation, an earthly perspective. We set our gaze upwards. In the days of the next dispensation men set their gaze on the future; perhaps upwards as well, for the Lord comes from above, but in any case it is a dispensation with a fixed length of forty years.

It concerns life as soul, that is, in the old man, or simply in the body, for that is the soul. It concerns the practical walk: the things a man does or omits, what he is set upon, what occupies him. In that coming dispensation this is of the utmost importance, because there tribulations will prevail. There will be persecution of believers. That is true even now, but in the coming dispensation far more: systematic persecution and extermination of believers. Precisely in that dispensation it is said that one must endure unto the end in order to be saved. Very much depends upon that.

This is evident also from the further course of this epistle, where far more emphasis is laid on the works of the believer than in any other book of the Bible. That does not mean that this thought does not occur in other books, but in James there is much more emphasis on the fact that faith is a dead faith if no works proceed from it. Sadly, I know people who have claimed for years that they are believers, but in whom it is never seen outwardly. When precisely the opposite of what one might expect comes to light, one must conclude – I know that this is dangerous – that such a person is not a believer. Then I say with James: if it is really true that you are a believer, then show me that first. You can say it, and I am quite prepared to believe it, but then the facts must also prove to be in agreement with it, certainly after the lapse of years.

There are people who say that they are believers but who are genuinely not born again. They may indeed know Biblical truths, but they have never made them their own. They have never come to surrender themselves to the Lord Himself, who is the Truth. There are also people who are born again and then treat that as the end point. They have no faith in daily life, even though they are born again. That is why James says: “shew me thy faith by thy works.”

James 2:18

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

James 1:22

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

A true hearer is, of course, automatically a doer. Here it is mentioned separately. In such a verse the emphasis still lies on the fact that one must be a hearer. Therefore it says: “Be not hearers only” – for they were that already – “but be also doers.” There are always fewer doers than

hearers. There are many people with whom the Word of God comes into contact, but only few who receive it. Then there are even fewer with whom it also works itself out practically in their walk, who are also doers of the Word.
In the dispensation that the apostle James primarily has in view, one must believe … and something more. One must also continue. One must believe and endure unto the end in order to be saved. That has everything to do with that sixth dispensation, in which, in the first place, Israel comes to faith, of which James is the representative. Israel was originally called:

> 1 Peter 2:9
> …that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

It is a people to whom salvation and the priesthood have been entrusted, that they might administer these and bring them to all the nations among the Gentiles. If now, after roughly 3,500 years, Israel finally turns to the Lord, He says (freely rendered): “Show Me thy faith by thy works.” If you now turn to Me, you must now at last do what you failed to do in the past. In the past they were not only to follow the Lord in the wilderness, but also to live accordingly and serve Him, to be subject and obedient to Him. Israel must also do that in the future before the Kingdom will be finally established over them.
In that context those well-known parables in Matthew 24 and 25 speak: about the two servants, about the five wise and the five foolish virgins, and about the talents. It all has to do with enduring unto the end. Virgins, show Me your faith by your works. Servants, show Me your faith by your works. They will have to show it to the Lord. To believe and to live accordingly is then one and the same thing. It is really self-evident that one lives in accordance with what one believes. If one truly believes, it becomes part of one’s person, and one therefore lives accordingly. At the very least it has an impact on one’s walk.
One must therefore not only be a hearer, but also a doer of the Word, and not deceive oneself with false reasoning. That is to say, of course you can construct a line of argument as to why it is not so important that one should also be a doer of the Word. Such reasonings do exist, for one can indeed show from Scripture that a man is not justified by works, but that:

> Romans 4:5
> …to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

And that is true – but it is not the whole story. It is true, but there is more that follows. The difficulty is that when people are saved, they treat that as an end point. It is not so. That is when it begins. New birth is not an end. Birth is never an end; it is a beginning, and new birth is likewise. What follows upon that are those good works which:

> Ephesians 2:10
> …God hath before ordained that we should walk in them;

or, in James’ words, that we should be doers of the Word, or, as in Matthew 24:13, that we should endure.
It is said, in connection with the next dispensation, very clearly that one must believe, but also endure unto the end in order to be saved. The

epistle to the Hebrews, however, speaks of the present dispensation, in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ who is:

> Hebrews 1:3; 10:12; 12:2 (KJV, excerpts)
> …sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;
> …this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;
> …and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It is said that we should run the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1). In 1 Timothy 6:12 it says that we should “fight the good fight of faith” and thus hold fast the faith. That is indeed endurance. The epistle to the Ephesians says that we must put on the whole armour of God in order to stand, to withstand the evil one (Ephesians 6:11, 13). That too is endurance. In Ephesians it is, in the first place, about spiritual conflict, about spiritual matters, for there our conflict lies.
In the epistle of James and in the other apostolic epistles, by contrast, we have to do with a earthward-directed struggle, a conflict directly connected with earthly circumstances. One does not have the mark of the beast and therefore cannot buy or sell. One then faces persecutions of Christians, persecutions of believers, just as in our own day we have unfortunately become familiar with persecutions of Jews and, of course, persecutions of Christians. Then one is confronted with social circumstances in which one must endure and remain faithful to the Lord. That is true in our days as well, even if our salvation is not directly at stake, but in any case our reward is – and that reward is also reckoned as belonging to salvation.

James 1:23
For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:
Your face is natural (literally “birth-face”). It perishes very quickly. That is what James has observed. He has noticed that someone stands before the mirror looking at his own face, then walks away and no longer knows what he looked like. It is indeed a phenomenon that a man cannot remember his own face. He can recognise it when he sees it on a photograph, but man has no memory for his own face. A man’s eyes are set outward. He is directed towards the other, rather than towards himself. It is therefore entirely natural that he remembers another, but not himself. There is also a very practical reason. We can remember someone else’s face not because we have seen it once, but because we have seen it alive. It moves; we know its characteristic expressions. We recognise the movements in it. We never see that of ourselves.
James has noticed this and says: someone who is a hearer of the Word and not a doer of the Word is like a man who has seen his own face in a mirror, then turns away and has forgotten it.

James 1:24
For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

That is someone who is indeed a hearer of the Word, but not a doer. He knows the Truth; he recognises it when he comes into contact with it – but he forgets it again.

James 1:25
But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.
This is, of course, a rather long-winded way of bringing something out, but it is clearly said. The one who looks into the perfect law is the one who does not only hear the Word, superficially, but also acquires insight, understands it, takes it in. He has insight into the perfect Word. That is the point. It is here called the perfect law. Such a one naturally becomes a doer of the work, as it is further called.
Of this perfect law more is said by which that law is characterised. It says: “the perfect law of liberty.” The Word of God – in any case the Gospel, and that is the Word of God – proclaims liberty. The Lord Jesus quoted that from Isaiah (Luke 4:17–19; Isaiah 61:1–2). When the Messiah would come, He would preach and proclaim liberty to the captives, liberty to those who are bound, and the opening of the eyes to the blind, the opening of the ears to the deaf – in short, He would proclaim “the acceptable year of the LORD.”
The Word of God does not proclaim bondage, but liberty – a deliverance out of Egypt, for example. Galatians says that we should stand, and continue to stand, in what has been preached to us, and thus:
Galatians 5:1
Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.
And:

> John 8:32
> And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

That which binds us, puts a band around us and presses us down, can never be the truth, for the truth makes free. There is so much preaching that places us under pressure, that accuses us or lays duties upon us and in any case makes us despondent. That can never be the truth. The truth makes free. That is a simple biblical principle, and the Truth is Christ.

> John 14:6
> Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Hence it is the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.
When the apostle James says that a believer must also be a doer of the Word, he is not thereby speaking of slavery or servitude. He is speaking of freedom. But why should anyone receive freedom? Why should you give a slave his freedom? On the one hand because he is bound, and on the other hand so that in that freedom he may then do the things that are profitable. The difference between slavery and freedom is that in slavery one must do what another commands, whereas in freedom one can do what one himself wills.

Of a believer you may expect that he wants to serve the Lord. It is therefore not that a believer must serve the Lord, although in a certain sense that can be defended. In a moral sense he has that obligation more or less, but that obligation is nowhere imposed upon him. A believer, when he takes in the Word of God, desires to serve the Lord. Hence that remarkable legislation under the old covenant which says that a slave must be let go free in the sabbatical year (Exodus 21:2). Then he can choose to remain with his master (Exodus 21:5–6). He receives liberty, and the servitude in which he then remains is one that he himself has chosen, of his own free will. It is not imposed upon him.

The perfect law is a law of liberty, and we have been made free by the Gospel, by the new covenant. We live under the new covenant in this fifth dispensation, but those of whom James primarily speaks also live under the new covenant, albeit in the sixth dispensation. It is the same new covenant. So it is indeed about the same liberty, namely liberty to serve the Lord.

James 1:25 links up with Galatians, that they should abide by what they had been taught and continue in the Spirit (Galatians 3:3). If you do not forget the Word and truly have insight into that perfect law and into the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, then you become a doer of the Word. That has its outworking in life – in our life, it says here. If he is not a forgetful hearer, but continues in the perfect law of liberty, then he becomes a doer of the work. He:

“…shall be blessed in his deed.” (James 1:25 KJV)

Because it is not slave-labour, but a work which he in freedom chooses to do. It is indeed a burden, a yoke, but it is easy (Matthew 11:30).

Here it is about what proceeds from faith. Mark well: it is not about works performed in order to become acceptable to God! It is about serving the Lord on the ground that God has already accepted us. It is not about working in order then to enter into rest, but about works that proceed from rest itself. In the epistle to the Hebrews, especially in Hebrews 4, we read that the Lord Himself has rested from His works, and that those who believe in Him have also entered into that rest (Hebrews 4:4, 10). After that, the rest of the epistle to the Hebrews speaks about the work that the Lord does. He is our High Priest. He makes reconciliation for the sins of the people, and He helps us in time of need – and yet that is called rest (Hebrews 2:17; 4:16).

For the believer it is just the same. There are even things that simply cannot be done without having rest. Deeds proceed from faith. We shall discuss this at greater length in connection with the second half of James 2, for that speaks about it in much more detail. Above that section, above James 2:14, stands: “The unprofitableness of faith without works.” For now it is already said: not only hearing, but also doing. That was said already in Romans 2:

Romans 2:13

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Here too it is about law, but then about the perfect law, that of liberty, whereas in Romans 2 it is about the law under the old covenant. Here,

however, it is about a new law – the new covenant. Then the same principle holds: that one must not only be a hearer, but most certainly a doer of the work. Such a one shall be blessed in his doing.

James 1:26

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

"Religious" is the normal word for "religion" in the Bible. The peculiar thing is that this concept applies to, for example, Judaism – that is religion – but not to Christianity, because Christianity is not a religion. Christianity perhaps does not even know that about itself. Religion has to do with one's manner of life. It has to do with a collection of duties and rites that are laid upon the religious. The religious person must do certain things; he must omit certain things; he must live according to the regulations. That is religion.

In this word that is here translated by "religion", the word "God" is not present at all in the original. It could therefore better be translated simply as "religion" in the secular sense. There is no "God" in it. It is a way of life. Of the old covenant it is said that it had ordinances of divine service:

> Hebrews 9:1
> Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

The old covenant is indeed religion, but the new covenant is not. Insofar as the new covenant is called "service", we arrive at Romans 12:1:

> Romans 12:1
> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Not your cow or your bullock or your ox or your heifer or your goat, but your bodies as a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. That is not "religion" in the traditional sense, but rather the fulfilment of that religion. It concerns things that were shadows of things to come. Therefore what we know is the fulfilment of religion, and not religion itself.

James says that whoever thinks himself to be "religious" must, first of all, bridle his tongue. That is a striking statement, to which he returns later in James 3. A bridle has to do with the steering of a horse. A horse has a bit in its mouth by which the whole animal is guided. In:

> James 3:4
> (v.3 in context about bits; v.4 about ships)

it is indeed said that by the tongue or the mouth one can direct the whole creature. Here it says that if a man is able to keep his tongue in check, to control it, to direct it, to impose his will upon it, he can control his whole being. Then he has self-control. According to:

> Galatians 5:22–23
> …the fruit of the Spirit is… temperance:

self-control (temperance) is the last-named fruit of the Spirit. The hardest thing to keep in check is the tongue. "This man's religion is vain," it says. If anyone thinks he is religious, he must therefore first of all control his tongue.

Thus there is here a warning about the tongue. And there is yet something else involved. Under certain circumstances it can be very unwise to speak much about the Gospel, especially where we have to do with persecution of Christians. Then it is wise to know what you say and to whom you say it. You should, of course, not be afraid, no – but it is also pointless to bring things up when you know in advance that it will have no effect anyway. That will certainly be so in the days of persecution – in the sixth dispensation – of which James is here speaking. Hence the great emphasis he lays on the tongue. It is about the right things being said; not too much and not too little.
Those are also the days of which it is said that the Gospel will be preached briefly in a certain place (Matthew 10:5–15). If in that place they do not receive the Word, one must simply move on. One must not labour for years on the same spot. No, one brings them the Gospel, and that is that. One must do that well, of course, but that is all. Not too much, not too little, not too much energy wasted. Say what must be said, and there it rests. For those who truly seek, a few words are enough. For those who do not want it at all, you may go on talking, but it will not help. That is a waste of time and energy.
For examples I refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Lord says only what is strictly necessary, and then sends men away with the message: “Think that over now.” Whoever reflects, light will dawn upon; whoever does not, is not worthy that more should be told him than that.
It is said that he who does not bridle his tongue thereby deceives himself, that is, his own heart. He talks, but the one who is swept along by what he says is he himself. People are sometimes very impressed by their own words. There are even people who lie as if they believed it themselves. They deceive themselves with all that talk. What one should do is listen to the Word, and preferably to the Word of God, for that is what it is about. So: keep the tongue still, be slow to speak, swift to hear – to listen. There is more to come:

James 1:27
Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,
and to keep himself unspotted from the world.
Judged on the basis of outward appearance.
First of all, we must read here that evidently strangers come into an already existing fellowship. In any case – whether rich or poor – they are not turned out a priori. They are welcome, the poor as well.
The difference in outward appearance is also not a difference that is explained by some personal attitude, some deliberate provocation or challenging bearing of these people, but only by the fact that they are either poor or rich. From that we may assume that a man dresses in accordance with what he can afford.
The rings are usually gold signet rings. Those are worn only by people who possess a seal and for whom a seal has a use. It is about people with authority: dignitaries with a gold ring and fine clothing. Clothing has from

ancient times been the indication of a certain authority. It is meant to impress, to enforce respect, to make an impression.
When a poor man appears – whom you recognise immediately by his inferior clothing – it is wrong to draw conclusions on the basis of his clothing. Such people are welcome, not on the basis of who they are in the world, but on the basis of their being believers.
“Stand thou there,” or, “Sit here under my footstool,” means that it is a humiliating position. In any case, the point is the distinction that is made between rich and poor. If you do that, this passage says:

> “Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?” (James 2:4 KJV)

That expression “to make a difference” is one of the forms of the word “to judge” in the Bible, namely krinō – here diakrinō. Diakrinō actually means to discriminate, to form a judgement in advance. It is about discrimination. “Have ye not then in yourselves made a difference,” that is, discriminated in advance, “and are become judges of evil thoughts?”
“Judges of evil thoughts” does not mean that they judge about evil thoughts, but that they judge with evil thoughts. It means that evil thoughts are their character and quality. They are judges who think (or consider) evil, for here they judge, they discriminate, not on the basis of whether one believes, but on the basis of the outward appearance, whether one is rich enough.
With God there is no respect of persons, and therefore it ought not to be found with man either.

> Romans 2:11
> For there is no respect of persons with God.

God does not regard the outward appearance, but the inward.

> 1 Samuel 16:7 (KJV, part)
> …for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Whether there is faith or unbelief in it – that is what God looks at; and on that basis He chooses or rejects.

James 2:5
Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?
God has chosen the poor – only if they are rich in faith. That is what it says. God chooses the poor. In the preceding verses it was said that we would reject the poor. James says: well then, remember that God does choose poor people, for it is not about their poverty; it is about whether they are believers.
God chooses neither the poor nor the rich as such, the way man does in the previous verse. The words “to be” in “to be rich in faith” should really be left out: they are not called in order to become rich in faith; they were rich in faith, and therefore God called them in spite of their poverty, and notwithstanding their poverty made them heirs of the Kingdom.
Those are the ones who love Him – but earlier in the verse it says that they are the ones who are rich in faith. To believe in the Lord is

synonymous with loving Him. Whoever believes Him, loves Him, and vice versa. Faith is not something that God gives to an unbeliever; it is simply the direct result of the Word of God. That is what Romans 10 also says:

Romans 10:17

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Unbelief is in fact the result of one's own sinful nature, but the normal, neutral reaction to a word is that one believes it. If you do not have too many "reasonings", it is far easier to believe.

James 2:6a

But ye have despised the poor…

The poor man is simply that poor man taken as the example in verse 2, that poor man in vile raiment. That poor man is despised, whereas God is precisely the One who chooses a poor man on the basis of his faith and makes him an heir of the Kingdom. Someone who is an heir of the Kingdom of God ought not to be assigned a place such as is indicated here. That is a dishonour; therefore it says: "Ye have despised the poor." After that the verse continues with the rich.

James 2:6b

Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

It turns out to be exactly the rich who use their power and influence to oppose the believers, to hinder them. "Do not rich men oppress you?" That is, the rich use the force at their disposal in every possible way. They commit violence against the believers, and they are the ones who "draw" them before the judgement seats, that is, drag them into court.

All this has to do with right and wrong, with law and regulations – with the fact that one must not only be a hearer of the law but also a doer of the law. These rich men who summon the believers before the judgement seats try to bring about injustice. That does not mean that all rich men do this by definition, but the point is simply that a poor man is unable to do such things.

James 2:7

Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

I do not understand why the translators have not written "Name" here with a capital letter. The only worthy Name that can ever be called upon over anyone is the Name of the Lord:

Romans 10:13

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

They blaspheme the worthy Name. When Christians are slandered, then the Name of Christ is slandered with them. There is a passage where unbelieving Israel has become a reproach among the nations, and to Israel God says:

Romans 2:24 (KJV, quoting Isaiah 52:5)

For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

Man is then the occasion for the blaspheming of the Name of the Lord. Wherever believers are blasphemed, in fact the One in whom they believe

is being blasphemed. It is these rich men who use their power, influence, and simply their money to do this.

The Neighbour

James 2:8

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

That neighbour is the fellow-believer, regardless of his possessions. He is to be loved, and not pushed back or preferred, for that is what the law says. And that is also what stands in the next verse.

James 2:9

But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

The “person” is the outside, the outward appearance. The law says that one may not regard the person. If, therefore, one wishes to fulfil the law, one must love one’s neighbour and not reject him on the basis of his outward appearance.

To love one’s neighbour means in practice simply to love Christ, and along with Him to love the Christian, the fellow-believer. In Romans 13 the same thought is brought forward. The neighbour is the One who has shown us mercy (Luke 10). From that it follows that those who are connected with Him who showed us mercy have also become our neighbours.

If you apply it to Israel under the old covenant – for to them that law was given – the neighbour is clearly the fellow-countryman. It concerned the way in which one Israelite was to deal with another. That neighbour was not a Gentile, but a fellow-Israelite. Under the new covenant and in connection with the present dispensation, it is expressly the case that our neighbour is the one who belongs to the same people as we do – the Church.

That is the royal law, the main sum, the sum total of the law. If you add up all the articles of the law, you arrive at: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Opposite of fulfilling the law stands:

James 2:9

But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

This points to the law in, for example, Leviticus 19. The heading there is “Laws of holiness and justice”, and it deals with social legislation.

> Leviticus 19:15
> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

“Judgment” is a lawsuit. What is called in the New Testament “respect of persons” is called in the Old Testament “respect of faces”, for a face or a person is exactly the same. “Face” in Hebrew is the surface, the outside of something. Hence the word is used for the surface of the sea, “the face of the deep”.

Thus it is said that Moses saw the face of God; yet we read that he saw His "back parts" (Exodus 33:23). The point is that it was the outside. Therefore it is called "face", and that is the meaning here. "In righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." If you love your neighbour, you will do him right. You will not favour him or push him back.
James may well have had this verse in mind. It speaks about respect of the face or of the person, and it uses the word "neighbour". Judgement is what is right, or should bring forth right. Anyone who respects the outside commits sin and becomes a transgressor of the law, and is thus in fact condemned by the law (James 2:9). One is supposed to love one's neighbour and not judge him by his outward appearance.

James 2:10
For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.
This is explained in the next verses. Someone who respects persons transgresses the law. He does not break one of the "ten articles" of the law, for there are hundreds of them. Whoever breaks even one of those hundreds, breaks the law. That is what it says: whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, is guilty of all – that is, of the whole law.

James 2:11
For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.
Someone who has managed to be faithful in marriage, but has nevertheless killed, might just as well have forgotten his marital fidelity; he is a transgressor of the law anyway.
The same applies to respect of persons. Whoever respects persons is a transgressor of the law. In this connection we must, of course, remember that no one is any longer under the law, because:

> Romans 10:4
> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

The point is precisely that everyone who believes should also be treated on that basis – on the basis of God's will. The law is the expression of God's will, and that is unchanged. The point is that we who love Him are also expected to live in accordance with His Word. That Word teaches that God chooses every believer. We are therefore to do the same, regardless of who he or she is.
Thus God has dealt with us, and because we know that Word and desire to be doers of the Word, we acknowledge that rule – not because we must, but because of the liberty we have. The intention is that we should use that liberty to act toward one another in this way. That is what it says:

James 2:12
So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Words and deeds are mentioned one after the other. “Be not hearers only, but doers also.” Our speaking, our whole conduct, is to proceed from the consciousness – I apply it first to ourselves – that the walk of a believer is decisive for the reward he receives.
The liberty in which we stand is decisive for our conduct. Examples of such conduct are indeed given here, for instance that we should love our neighbour and that there should be no respect of persons. That is especially important in the various disputes that so often exist between believers. These are not caused by differences of faith or understanding, but simply by respect of persons, for that is a fleshly matter. There lies the problem.
That is why attention is drawn to who we are and how we have come into such a fellowship, namely by God’s election on the basis of faith. On that same basis we, therefore, accept our brother or sister – not because he demonstrates his faith so clearly, for we did not do that either, but simply because the Lord has received him. Appearance or social rank and status have nothing whatsoever to do with it.

James 2:13a
For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy…
A merciless judgement will indeed come upon the one who has shown no mercy, for mercy is still one of the fruits of the Spirit. The reward that a believer receives is very much dependent on the fruit of the Spirit in that body and in that life.
If someone who claims to be a believer has in practice shown no mercy to others, then he will himself, of course, come under the unmerciful judgement of God. That does not mean that he loses his salvation, but it does mean that it has consequences for his position in eternity.
(…and the verse goes on, but that belongs to the next section.)

James 2:13b
…and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.
That is a slightly difficult sentence in English as it stands, but it is actually translated very neatly and literally. It means that mercy takes the side against judgment. “Rejoiceth against” means it boasts over, it exults over it, sets itself above it. “Against” here has the sense of “in the place of”.
In other words: mercy is higher and takes the place of judgment. Instead of our judging and being quick to pronounce judgement on one another, we ought to hold back our judgement of others a little, for mercy is far better.
I do not mean that we have no right ever to give an opinion about others – that too occurs in Scripture – but it is not the first thing. For believers, the first thing is that we show mercy to one another, receive one another, love our neighbour.
In the coming dispensation one will be expected to persevere, to continue in what has been taught. It is in that framework that this epistle is written. It deals with all kinds of things that happen to the believers; situations in life which they meet with. In James 2 it is set out that the walk of the

believer must be in harmony with the Word, and therefore also with those who believe.
The emphasis lies on the Word, but works or deeds are not denied by that; they are contained in it. Those works spring forth from faith, so that it always remains true that men are justified by faith. That is exactly what we also read in:
James 2:23
And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.
So there we have precisely the same as in Galatians 3:6 and Romans 4:3. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. In the verse before that, it says expressly that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. That does not mean that he did not work, but that, insofar as he did work, those works proceeded from his faith, so that his faith is the cause of his salvation and not his works. That is what James 2 is saying.

Why Works matters

In James 2, “works” are not works of the law done to earn salvation. They are works that flow out of genuine faith—the outward evidence that faith is real, living, and mature.
James’ key target is the person who says they have faith but shows no corresponding fruit:

- James 2:14–16: If someone claims faith but gives only words (“be warmed and filled”) instead of help, that faith is useless—it “profits” nothing in practice.
- James 2:17–18: Faith is invisible unless it produces something visible. So James says, in effect: “Show me faith without works.” You can’t. Works are how faith is demonstrated.
- James 2:19: Mere correct belief (even “God is one”) isn’t enough—demons believe that too. True faith is more than agreeing with facts; it acts.
- Abraham (2:21–23): Abraham was counted righteous by faith, but his faith was shown and brought to maturity through obedience (offering Isaac). His works didn’t create faith; they completed/fulfilled it.
- Rahab (2:25): Rahab’s faith became visible through risk-taking action—protecting the spies. Again: faith proved by what she did.
- James 2:26: Works relate to faith like breath relates to a body. No breath = dead body; no works = dead/idle faith.
-

Why it matters

- It exposes empty profession. Saying “I believe” is not the same as believing.
- It protects the meaning of faith. Biblical faith trusts God—so it moves a person to act.
- It connects to accountability and reward. James is heavily concerned with the believer’s walk (living out the Word), not merely correct talk.
- It leads into James 3. If faith is only words, the tongue becomes hypocritical—hence the next chapter’s warning about speech.

In short: James 2 matters because it insists that real faith doesn’t remain private or theoretical—sooner or later it shows up in how you live and love.

James 2:14

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

It says, “What doth it profit?” The question itself does not stop at the first question mark, but only at the end of verse 16, for this passage begins with “What doth it profit?” and ends with “what doth it profit?” at the end of verse 16. That question is then further developed in the intervening verses, so that the answer only comes from verse 17 onwards.
The “profit” of which he asks here is not profit in the sense that it must produce some advantage, but the question is: does it save? That is why the question is repeated in other words immediately afterwards: “Can faith save him?” The “profit” is salvation.
Notice carefully that it does not say: “What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man believes and have not works?” With that, the traditional problem of this passage – that it would contradict Romans and Galatians – is actually already solved.
It says: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?” There lies the difference. It is about the speaking,

the saying. A man can say that he believes, but if he does not have the works, can that faith save him? That is James's line of thought. That is exactly what stands here.
If a man says that he believes and he has not the works, then he is a liar. The principle is that faith produces works. If a man says that he believes and on the other hand has not the works, then James shows in two ways that he in fact has no faith at all – for if you must say it, it is already wrong.
If someone truly is a believer and lives out of that, he will not need to say that he is a believer; that will be clear enough. That is why Abraham and Enoch do not themselves say that they are believers. Even the Lord Jesus does not say it in that way. It is stated about them, and it is clearly demonstrated.
Of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 we read that it is from their works that it appears that they were believers. Not all men are the same and not all show the same works. The point is the principle that faith works, that something comes forth from it. In the first place that is the renewal of the mind, and even that can already be a very complex matter. Not everyone thinks equally easily, and therefore not everyone changes just as easily in his thoughts, let alone in his manner of thinking. Only thereafter follows a possible change in walk. That ought to be there, but it is not there from one day to the next.
It says, "Can that faith save him?" "To save" is the general expression for the work of Christ in us. Applied to us and the Church, "to save" is a term used for the receiving of reward. That is that notorious text in Philippians that is also so badly understood:
Philippians 2:12
…work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.
There it really is said that salvation is inherited by works, only that salvation does not consist of a place in heaven, but of a particular position in heaven. It has nothing to do with whether one gets there or not, but with the reward one receives.
The word "salvation" or "to be saved" has to do with both. The one is "getting over the threshold"; the other concerns how far you come after that. You must not give the word a narrower meaning than necessary. The intention is that by works one, in a certain way, adds something to salvation. That is also the rest of Philippians, where Paul says:
Philippians 3:12
Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.
This is not about getting into heaven, for strictly speaking he was already there, but about the reward – whether he answers to God's demands, whether he has reached the goal that God had set for Himself with Paul. That is different for everyone. One is judged on the basis of how much Christ has done in us, not on where we have arrived.
In James 2:14, then, the question is: Is one saved by a faith that does not show itself in works? If someone believes, that will sooner or later show itself in something. He is saved by such faith in the sense that he is

preserved, but if no works follow, then there is no reward. That is a clear matter. In that sense, then, it “does not save”.
You see that, if you try to apply this to a specific situation, you get into difficulties because James himself does not here precisely specify where he is speaking about. That does not mean he is at fault; he simply speaks in general terms. The general thought is that faith ought to be followed by works that proceed from that faith.
That which we shall receive from the Lord in the future most certainly has to do with “the things done in the body” (2 Corinthians 5:10). That is the general sense of this passage.

James 2:15
If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,
This concerns a case where a brother or sister is unable to provide for his or her own livelihood. It does not say: If a man be naked and destitute of food, but a brother or sister.
People will take it very ill of me, but the Bible nowhere teaches that the believer ought to supply the lack and shortcomings of the world. He may do so, but he is not at all obliged. The believer ought to supply the shortcomings of brothers or sisters, the household of faith.
It does not occur so often nowadays; we have others who arrange such things. But it could very well happen that we know believers who are in need. Then it is our responsibility to provide help. I hope the line of thought is clear.

James 2:16
And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?
You can of course say, “Be warmed,” but then you must do something about it, or, “Be filled,” but if you do not give him bread, that has little sense. You can say, “I believe,” but that means nothing if it does not show itself in something. Faith is a trust in the Lord, and that ought to show itself somewhere.
Our wishing someone warmth or fullness must show itself in something. Words alone are useless. That is why James 3 follows, where it is about bridling the tongue. Then you had better say nothing. That is why it says later: “But above all things, my brethren, swear not” (James 5:12). Do not promise anyone anything, please.
That is also what we read here in James 2:17, for there comes the answer to the problem posed in verses 14–16. It was about: what profit is there, if someone says something and nothing follows from it?

James 2:17
Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.
Already from this remark it is clear that in the preceding verses it is about faith and the works proceeding from it. That is illustrated once more here. The works mentioned here are not the believer’s works as such, but the works of faith, “the work of faith”. The works proceed from faith, just as

we are justified by faith (Romans 10:6) and just as our righteousness and our salvation proceed from faith to faith (Romans 1:17).
Our righteousness, our salvation, and so also our works, proceed from faith. It does not say: “Even so the believer, if he have not works, is dead, being alone,” but: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” It says “it”, not “he”. Therefore it is about works that ought to proceed from faith.
The question is not so much about the person himself, but about the faith: is it really there or not? In my view there should be a comma between “being alone” and “dead”. The translators have, I think, missed the point, for what is being said is that this faith is dead.
For an understanding of how faith can be dead, let me refer back to:
Genesis 2:17
…for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.
Death is separation, and that is also what we see in James. Faith, if it has not works, is by itself, that is, dead. It is “by itself”: it stands alone, on its own. That means there is no communication. Nothing goes out from it and nothing comes to it. There is no contact with it.
That man may say that he believes, but of that faith nothing can be seen. Nothing comes forth from it. It is isolated. The faith is there, but it does absolutely nothing. Nothing comes out; it is therefore “by itself”.
“Dead” does not mean that it does not exist; it exists, but in itself, and outside it there is nothing; there is no fellowship with it, and so it does not work. Therefore believers who do not show the works of faith also do not know the fellowship of faith, to use another term.
A fellowship of faith exists only when the faith of the members of that fellowship actually does show itself in something – apart from their words. Then there can be fellowship.

James 2:18a
Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works…
There is always someone who makes a remark. With Paul it was the same. He says: “But some man will say…” (1 Corinthians 15:35). No one had actually said it, for it was a letter, but he knew exactly how his readers would react. He knew his people – and James also.
If someone says anything, he always begins with “But…”. The sentence “Thou hast faith, and I have works” is somewhat awkward, but its meaning is simple. James expects that one believes and works out of that faith – both together.
Then James comes with a very strong remark which, unfortunately, has been completely undermined in the translation. For the answer to that statement, “The one believes and the other works,” is:

James 2:18b
…shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.
So it really says: “Shew me thy faith without thy works” – thus apart from your works. Show me your faith, but not out of your works, not via your works, but without them. Try that then!

If you say, “Well, the one believes and the other works,” James says: “All right, then show me your faith – but not with those works, for those works belong to someone else, as you yourself just said. Now, without those works, show me your faith.”
Then it becomes evident that this is impossible. In order to make faith visible, those works are precisely what is needed; otherwise it appears nowhere. In this way faith and works belong together. Faith is inner, inward; the works are the outward result of it. If those works are not there, then that faith cannot be demonstrated.
The only outward proof of faith is a certain corresponding walk and growth.
Up to now, we have spoken only in general about someone who believes and who may or may not work. We have not spoken about work “for this one or that one or in that direction”, but quite generally. But if this is generally true – that faith cannot be shown without works or apart from works – then it means that it is also true that faith, for God as well, does not show itself if those works are not there.
Then we come back to the question: “Can that faith save him?” (James 2:14). Of course you can say – and many do: “I believe, although you cannot see that just like that, but the Lord knows me, and He knows it.” But whereby, then? Because you say so?
Even Abraham had to show his faith to God. If it is true that God knows what is in a man – and that is undoubtedly correct – why then did Abraham have to be tested in such a way? Well, precisely because God also expects faith to manifest itself in works. There are examples enough of that.
The way of a believer has always been a way through trial. That is not only so in the tribulation to come, but has been so in general at all times. Faith must show itself by works; not in the first place for others, for fellow-believers, but in the first place for the Lord.
Hence the question: “Can that faith save him?” If no works have been done through the believer’s body – those works which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10) – then that believer also receives no reward from the Lord.
In James 2:19 follows a further explanation of the problem of the previous verses.

James 2:19
Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.
In fact it says, “Thou believest that God is one.” Why they translate it in such a complicated way I do not know. It should simply be: “Thou believest that God is one.”
There is no separate word for “one” in the Greek here, so if it is not strictly needed in the English, it should be left out.
There are many peoples who do not believe that God is one, although that is written in the Bible. If you believe that, “thou doest well,” it says. This remark again clearly shows the Jewish character and background of this epistle, for this is in fact the Jewish confession of faith (Deuteronomy 6:4).

“The devils also believe, and tremble.” That is, they are not saved by it. Every time the word “devil” occurs in the plural in the English Bible (“devils”), it is incorrect, for such a thing does not exist. “The devil” (diabolos) occurs in Scripture only in the singular. Where the English has “devils”, the Greek has “demons” or “evil spirits”.
The demons therefore believe the same as the believing Jews – and as these Christians did then – namely that God is one; but they are not saved by that. Such faith comes, then, in a rather curious light.

James 2:20a
But wilt thou know, O vain man…
Why does it say “vain”? In the first place because of the meaning of the word. “Vain” means “empty”. In the context here, a vain man is undoubtedly someone who perhaps does have faith, but does not have the works. He is therefore empty. Nothing comes out of him. To such a one it is said:
James 2:20b
…that faith without works is dead?
Then follows an illustration from the Old Testament.

<u>Abraham</u>
James 2:21
Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?
“Was he not justified by works?” – that is the difficult question. The question is posed in such a way that there is only one possible answer: yes. Yes, he was justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar.
Then it becomes very simple. Since this stands in Scripture, and therefore cannot contradict:

> Hebrews 11:17
> By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac…

…we must read James 2 in harmony with that. Here in James 2 it says that Abraham was justified by that offering of Isaac – that is, by those works. But the right order is important: he was justified by those works which proceeded from faith, says Hebrews 11. That is fully in line with the preceding verses in James. You must not play these verses off against each other; you must lay them side by side and then you will see that they lie exactly in one line.
For Abraham, the path of faith was this: offering Isaac.
For the Lord Jesus it was another path. He believed – in the sense that we are justified by His faith. The Lord Jesus did something for us. He fulfilled works for us. We speak of the work of redemption, the work of atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those works proceeded from His faith. Fundamentally, therefore, we are justified by His faith. It is much better to say that we are justified by the faith of Jesus Christ than by the works of Jesus Christ, although both are true. But the order is: first faith, and then works.

Since faith has to do with spiritual things, it is higher than works, which concern earthly things. Therefore the higher thing – faith – is taken as the basis, the source of our salvation. It is about a living faith. Because of the example of Abraham it becomes clear again that this passage has, in the first instance, a Jewish background.

James 2:22
Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?
Notice: it does not say, “Seest thou how the works…”, but, “Seest thou how faith…”. Faith is named first. Even though this passage is precisely dealing with works, nevertheless faith is mentioned first.
Faith wrought together with his works. The point is that faith does not stand alone, as verse 17 states, but that faith and works belong together and therefore work together, and so bring forth righteousness or salvation.
“Made perfect” does not mean that it was flawless and nothing was wrong with it, but that it was mature, complete, that nothing needed to be added. Faith had grown up, reached its full development.
That “being perfect” is the same as our word “grown-up” or “mature”. Faith is therefore brought to maturity by the works. From those works faith can be recognised – just as we know Abraham’s faith from the fact that he offered Isaac.

James 2:23
And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.
That is the statement repeated in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6: “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” You see, then, that faith without works stands alone, and is therefore dead.
It is striking that in James 2:20 the word “dead” is used. The expression “faith without works is dead” appears indeed in verse 17, and in verse 20 it also appears in the Authorized Version. Strictly speaking that is a little inaccurate here, for in verse 20 it really ought to be another word – the word meaning “idle” or “lying fallow”. That is: useless, it brings forth nothing, it produces nothing. That is synonymous with “dead”, but it is in fact a different word.
In the Textus Receptus it is not different – there the word “dead” stands in verse 20 as well – but in other manuscripts it is indeed argos: idle, unproductive. It brings forth no salvation.
Abraham believed God. That appeared from his works, and by that he was justified. Now follows the conclusion:

James 2:24
Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

It is about seeing. It is not about something simply being said and us hearing it – that someone says that he is a believer. No, it is about what can be seen.

If you read only half the verse, you will say: “So, after all, justified by works!” But then you have quoted the verse only half. It does not merely say that a man is justified by works; it says he is justified “by works… and not by faith only.”

The emphasis should really fall like this: not by faith only. It is faith and works. For faith without works – well, that simply cannot be. It is not complete, not mature. Faith must bear fruit; it must come to completion and bring forth its fruit in due time. That fruit is then works.

Hence a man is justified by faith and works. The difficulty is that it cannot be turned around. You cannot say: “A man is justified by works, and therefore by faith.” That does not work, for works never produce faith; but faith does produce works.

Therefore Scripture normally lays the stress on the fact that a man is justified by faith. That brings a certain risk – and that is what is always thrown in our teeth – namely that people say: “You speak so much of faith, but… no works then? That cannot be – just faith without works?”

I maintain stubbornly that this can be said, and must be said. There are so few who insist that a man is justified by faith that I will keep emphasising it. But that does not take away the fact that faith without works is dead, and that works do indeed come into it.

The danger, however, is that once one then begins to stress the works, faith is forgotten, and men are back to working their way to salvation, as the whole world is doing.

The truths of James 2 do absolutely nothing to weaken what Romans 4 says:

> Romans 4:5
> But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

With that, Scripture has concluded all under the law, for that is what it is about in that context. The promise is the promise made to Abraham, which should be given through the faith of Jesus Christ to them that believe. That is the same as Romans 3, where we read that:

> Romans 1:17
> …the just shall live by faith.

And:

> Romans 3:22
> Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe…

Here in Galatians 3 it is said in the same way:

> Galatians 3:23–25
> But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.
> Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
> But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The “we” here are Israelites. They were under the law until faith should come. That is the faith of Christ.
The law is “till the seed should come”, we read in:

> Galatians 3:19
> Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made…

That seed is Christ. So Galatians 3:23 says “unto the faith”, verse 24 says “unto Christ”, and thus it is the faith of Christ. The law, and with it the works of the law, is our schoolmaster up to Christ, and therefore up to the faith of Christ,
“…that we might be justified by faith.”

> Galatians 3:25
> But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Hence it is indeed said:

> Romans 4:5
> But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Where Scripture states that a man is justified by faith and not by works, it is speaking of works of the law, works of man, works of the flesh. That does not mean that we know of no works that contribute anything to our salvation, but those are not works before faith, but after it. The difference lies in the order.
The works James speaks of are not the works of man in the flesh, but the works of faith. If faith is what Scripture means by faith, then there also come forth works of the kind that Scripture means.

<u>Rahab</u>

James 2:25
Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?
Wherein did the works of Rahab the harlot consist? It is an odd question, because the answer is already hinted at: in whoredom. She was not justified by whoredom, of course – not by works of the flesh – but by works of faith.
A harlot can believe and still, at that moment, be a harlot. Do not be mistaken. Those spies in Jericho simply ended up in a brothel (Joshua 2:1). There, it turned out that one of the women was a believer. Can that be? Yes – as appears from her works.
She believed that God would give Jericho into Israel’s hand (Joshua 2:9). She believed in the God of Israel. Her works of the flesh were not what they ought to be, but when the opportunity came for her faith to become active, there were works of faith. She took risks and delivered those men. It was an act that would undoubtedly be interpreted as collaboration. Rahab was a believer, and the works of the flesh are not reckoned – whether they be “good” or “bad”, it matters not; they are works of the flesh and are not counted. What is reckoned is faith, and then the works of faith.

Scripture adds, for the sake of clarity, which works are meant here: the “messengers” are the spies; she received them, and sent them out another way. Therefore she was justified. Thus she was saved, and her salvation consisted, in the first place, in that she kept her life. Our salvation in fact also consists in that.
She then received a share in Israel’s blessings. She was brought into Israel. Indeed, she is mentioned with honour here, though she keeps the name “Rahab the harlot”. She was a believer, and therefore it is not to the honour of Rahab, but to the honour of the Lord, of course. She was justified by grace and through faith, and that faith was shown in the works which she did.

James 2:26
For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.
“Among you” we have crossed out before. Religion is threskeia (Greek). That is the word for “religion”. God is not so much directly involved with that; it has to do with a pious way of life. The word “God” is not contained in it. It is about a manner of life. Religion is the collection of rituals and works which believers are expected to perform. It therefore has to do with the practical walk. That is also the case in Romans 12, where it says that our reasonable service (our “religion”, so to speak) consists in bringing a sacrifice well-pleasing to God – and that is simply our own body.
Romans 12:1
I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.
With that body works may be done. That body is what the believer has here on earth. It is the earthly appearance of the believer and everything that goes with that. So it really does have to do with one’s walk.
In James 1 our walk is already in view where it says:
James 1:22
But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.
Then it is said of someone who is religious, or thinks himself religious (a “doer”): if he thinks that, and cannot control his tongue, then his religion is vain, and moreover he deceives his own heart by it.
James 1:26
If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.
In James 2 follows the expansion of “Be not only hearers, but also doers”, and in James 3 comes then a further comment on the tongue, which ought to be held in check.

James 3:1
My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.
The word here translated “master” is also translated “teacher” in, for example, Ephesians 4:11. A master is a teacher, an instructor. It refers to

those who give teaching, who engage in didactics; that idea is built into this Greek word. This word “master” is also the word by which the Lord Jesus is many times addressed. It is used 58 times in Scripture and most often applied to the Lord Jesus Himself. He is addressed as “Master”, and on a few occasions as “Rabbi”. The latter is not translated in our Bibles, because “rabbi” is not Greek but Hebrew. If it already appears in the Greek text of the New Testament, it is a Hebrew word in a Greek book. Because it is a different language, it is left as it is. “Rabbi” means “my master” or “my teacher”. Rab is the word for a teacher in Judaism. Of “rabbi” it is three times said in the Bible that it is translated “Master”, so there can be no doubt that this word “master” has the same meaning as “teacher”, also in the New Testament epistles. The Hebrew “rabbi” points to a title, a function. You cannot become “rabbi” as your trade – the Lord Jesus was not that either. He is called “Rabbi” because He behaves in that way. He behaves as a teacher.
Here the believers – the brethren – are told that they ought not to be many masters. That is of course rather striking, especially if we read such a thing in connection with Ephesians 4, where:

> Ephesians 4:11
> And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

So you would say: it is a fine thing if someone is a teacher, and you can hardly have too many. Yet here it says that there should not be many teachers. Already in James 1 it was said that believers ought to be slow to speak, but swift – quick – to hear:

> James 1:19
> Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

To be a teacher, a master, has very much to do with speaking. And then it says one should be slow in that. In James 3:1 this is repeated: “Be not many masters.” There are a few reasons for this, although the most obvious one – that there simply are not that many needed – is not even mentioned. Not that many are needed. That is simple enough, because whilst one man speaks, hundreds, even thousands, can listen. So you don’t need all that many. The question is only whether people really do listen. I think, for example, that in the Netherlands there are not too few teachers, but that there is too little listening.
The title “master” or “rabbi” is really a form of address. In English they say this title is equivalent to their title “doctor.”. A doctor is someone who has qualified as an expert in a particular field, and who is therefore generally authorised to teach. It is not a profession, but a designation of what someone does.
James warns, then, not to be a master, a teacher. He says: you are better off not being one. The second reason is:

James 3

Controlling the Tongue (James 3)

The tongue is the most powerful and dangerous instrument of human life. Though small, it directs the whole person and spreads either truth or destruction. Teachers bear greater responsibility because words shape lives. True spiritual maturity is seen in controlled, truthful, peace-producing speech that flows from a heart governed by Christ and the wisdom from above.

1. Greater responsibility of teachers (James 3:1–2)
James includes himself when he warns that *teachers ("masters")* will receive stricter judgment because they influence many people through their words. Speaking carries accountability. Since all stumble—especially in speech—those who speak publicly must weigh their words carefully. Silence is safer than speaking without understanding, yet teachers cannot remain silent; therefore, they must speak responsibly and truthfully.
2. The tongue reveals maturity (James 3:2)
A person who does not stumble in speech is called *perfect*—meaning spiritually mature. Control of the tongue implies control of the whole person. Sanctification is incomplete until the tongue is brought under discipline.
3. Small instrument, enormous power (James 3:3–6)
James illustrates the tongue's power with three images:

- A bit controlling a horse
- A rudder steering a massive ship
- A spark igniting a great fire

Though small, the tongue directs lives, influences others, and spreads rapidly—often destructively. It can corrupt the whole person and set the course of life ablaze. Its destructive power is linked to *gehenna* (the lake of fire), emphasizing its origin in death, deception, and rebellion against God.
4. What defiles a person comes from the mouth (Matthew 15)
Jesus teaches that defilement does not come from what enters the mouth but from what comes out, because speech flows from the heart. Words reveal unbelief, evil thoughts, lies, and blasphemy. Thus, controlling speech matters more than outward religious practices.
5. The tongue cannot be tamed by human effort (James 3:7–8)
While humans can tame animals, no one can tame the tongue by natural means. It is unstable and full of deadly poison, like a serpent's venom—symbolizing unbelief and deception.
6. Inconsistency of blessing and cursing (James 3:9–12)
With the same tongue, believers bless God and curse people made in God's image. This contradiction "ought not to be." Just as a spring cannot produce both sweet and bitter water, speech reveals the true condition of the heart.
7. Wisdom shown in speech and conduct (James 3:13–18)
True wisdom from above is demonstrated not by argument but by a humble, peaceable walk. Earthly wisdom—marked by envy and strife—is soulish, demonic, and produces confusion (*Babel*) and evil deeds.
Heavenly wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, sincere, and fruitful. It leads to righteousness and peace among those who make peace.
8. Source of conflict (James 4:1)
Wars and quarrels arise from inner lusts warring within human nature. These conflicts are first expressed through the tongue. What begins in the heart is carried out in speech.

James 3:1
…knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.
That "we" is not "they". It does not say: "Be not many masters, my brethren, knowing that ye shall receive the greater condemnation." He

says: “knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” That “we” is James – and he is such a master. In any case he is a pastor, a teacher according to Ephesians 4, according to that same pattern. The teacher James says: “We, masters, we shall receive the greater judgement.”

James 3:2
For in many things we offend all….
That “we” in James 3:1–2 clearly refers to those masters of whom James is one. James says: “We shall receive the greater judgement, for in many things we offend all.” A master in this sense simply bears a far greater responsibility with regard to those hundreds or even thousands. The more people are listening, the more carefully we ought to weigh our words. Really, we ought always to be able to do that – that is the thrust of this passage. We are very poor at it. That is why James says in quite a general way: you would do well to be careful with your talking; you would do well to hold yourself back, for you will have to give account of it. If you cannot answer for what you say, you had better say nothing.
That does not mean a man should not be a teacher, but it does mean that a man should not talk about things he knows nothing about. There are people who, day in day out, talk a great deal about matters of which they have absolutely no understanding – and will never gain any understanding either, for that would require them to listen. The problem with “inspraak” (public input, as we call it nowadays) is that people talk about things of which they have no understanding. Though legally they have been given the right to speak, they are in no way able to speak, because they do not know what it is about. That applies in every sphere of life. But if you do not know what you are talking about, you had better keep your mouth shut, because words are tremendously powerful – and that is the thrust of this chapter.
This chapter is not intended to gag people. Its purpose is to warn people about what they say. They must know what they are saying. Can they answer for it? Or, more generally: is it even true? And still it remains so that “we all stumble in many things”. The intention, however, is that we should stumble as little as possible.
The difficulty is to say something properly and clearly to people. I probably do not need to explain that to you; you know the phenomenon well enough: you have spoken with someone, and afterwards you discover that your words are taken differently from how you meant them. They are, in your view, twisted. The fact is that, however clearly we try to put things to one another, we are always talking very close past each other. I once learned from someone that communication is talking as close past each other as possible.
Since the tongue is the hardest part of the body to control, those who speak much stumble the most. If you do not wish to make mistakes with your tongue, you must not use it. Yet the intention is indeed that if we are hearers of the Word, we also become doers of the Word – and what else should we do then, but bring the Word? Such a person speaks. A hearer of the Word takes the Word in; a doer of the Word is someone in whom that

Word comes out again – in the first place by the tongue. So it is not enough to say: “Then I shall keep silent.” Talking much is dangerous; but if you are a master or a teacher, you also bear a great responsibility. We all stumble in many things, but especially we stumble in words.

James 3:2
For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.
If he does not stumble in word, he himself is perfect; that is, fully grown, in the sense that nothing more needs to be added, nothing more improved. If he can do that – if a man does not stumble in word – then he is perfect. If he bridles his tongue, he also bridles his whole body. To “bridle” does not mean that nothing happens, or that one says nothing. To bridle means that one controls it, has it under control. The example is given in the next verse:

James 3:3
Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.
We put bits in the horses’ mouths that they may obey us. With such a bit, such a bridle in the mouth, their mouth is no longer free. They cannot move their tongue freely either. Their tongue (that is, their mouth) is in effect controlled. By that control over the animal’s mouth, we have control over the whole animal. It cannot go any way it pleases, except the way we want it to. In this way the apostle James makes clear that if the tongue is controlled, the whole body is controlled. To “hold in check” therefore means that it is directed according to the rules, controlled, so that nothing happens which will not pass inspection. Someone who knows exactly what he says and can answer for it, and who also knows exactly when he ought to speak and when he ought to be silent – such a person is perfect. Someone who can bridle his tongue is himself perfect, for he can bridle his whole body.
If you find that you really know no one who can bridle his tongue, you are right – because no one is perfect. That is why it is important to control that tongue as well as possible. The thought is: if we can control the horse’s mouth, if we can compel obedience from that “tongue”, then we also compel obedience from the whole animal. In other words: if our tongue obeys God, then our whole life obeys Him. That cannot fail, because that control takes place via the mouth. Since the tongue is the hardest to control, the control of the tongue is at once the finishing, the completion of the control of the whole person. Put in very different words: the sanctification of the believer is only complete when his tongue has become holy.

Heading this chapter stands: “The misuse of the tongue”. Without doubt that is what it is about; but we must first clearly see that this is not just a loose, separate chapter in the epistle of James. It is a subject that flows directly out of all that has gone before.

In the previous two chapters, James has set out – in his own distinctive way – that he expects someone who is a hearer of the Word to become also a doer of the Word, so that his walk truly shows his faith.
When he then actually begins to speak about such a walk, he addresses in James 3 first of all the tongue, and thus the word. We need the tongue very intensively. On the one hand for the processing of our food, in chewing – more than you might think. And further, the tongue is needed for speaking.
That is why, at the end of a long day like this, I am sometimes liable to stumble over my own tongue; the muscles do not want to co-operate so well any more.
We need the tongue very intensively for what we take in – that is the food – but equally for what goes out from us. Those two things belong together. The power that goes out from a man goes out above all through his mouth – and there the tongue is needed.
In James 3 it is particularly pointed out how much can go wrong through the tongue. It is a commentary on:

> James 1:26
> If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

James 3:4
Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.
With ships we are dealing with gigantic forces compared with human strength. Yet they are turned about by a very small rudder. Now, that rudder is not all that small in itself, but compared with the ship it is. In any case, a man, purely by muscular strength, operates the rudder of that ship, so that a man is able, with two hands, to steer such a mighty ship by means of a small rudder. That the rudder is a "tongue. We too call a flat blade or plate a tongue. It is a small rudder in proportion to a great ship.

James 3:5
Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!
The tongue is a small part of the body. Just as the rudder is a small part of the ship, so the tongue is a small member of the body. It is a small member, yet it "boasteth great things". The translators have rightly added "nevertheless". That tongue boasts great things.
The word "boasteth" here is a curious one, because it only appears in this form here in the Bible. Its sense is evidently that this little member brings great things to pass. This "boasting" has the meaning of accomplishing, effecting things. Even so the tongue is a small member, but it nevertheless brings great things about. As the small rudder turns the great ship, and the small bit turns the great horse, so the tongue, though a small member, is able to work great things.

James also mentions fire as an example. A tiny spark can do an enormous amount, for it “eats” on and spreads. That little thing, that small fiery tongue, can have huge consequences. That is said, by the way, in:

James 3:6
And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.
One tongue sets many tongues in motion, for one little flame sets a great many flames alight. One tongue loosens a host of other tongues. When a person says something, people can be talking about it for days afterwards, in an ever widening circle. It spreads so quickly; it is like fire. It goes round like wildfire. It burns, and it is dangerous. Our tongue, the tongue in general, is fire. That is to say, it really does consume, cause damage, and is a danger.
Although the tongue can be used in connection with the preaching of the gospel and the spreading of the Word of God, in practice the tongue is generally used in the opposite direction, namely for the spreading of rebellion against God – in short, for the spreading of the lie. For truth is not what people mostly speak. Usually people talk about things they have not experienced, that they cannot properly judge, of which they have only heard imperfectly. Everything they say about such things is therefore defective and, for the greater part, untrue. I say that now, but it is exactly the thrust of what James brings forward here – and what do you think of the other apostolic letters, especially those of John? They are about nothing else than truth versus lie. In the whole world it comes down to these things: truth and falsehood. The Truth is but one thing, of course. The Truth is Christ, and so the Word of God. All that is not the Word of God is in any case lie.
The tongue is a fire, a cosmos, a world of iniquity. This is then explained: “…so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” (James 3:6b, KJV)
It says that the tongue has a particular position among our members. The tongue defiles the whole body, especially inwardly. That is something which the other members cannot do, but the tongue can. The tongue “setteth on fire the course of nature” – that is, it sets it ablaze. We are dealing here with that fire. And in one breath it is said that, although the tongue is a fire, the fire of the tongue comes from the lake of fire, here translated “hell”. It is what brings death, what serves death and iniquity – in short, it serves the lie. That is the place the tongue has in our body; so you have been warned. It is a small tongue that can cause so much disaster. The tongue not only makes our body unclean, it makes it sick.
In Matthew 15 the Lord Jesus Himself speaks about the tongue. The disciples do not understand it either.

> Matthew 15:10–11
> And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

This is said without any introduction at all to Judaism, in which, according to the law, cleanness depended on what entered into a man – what he ate. It had to be kosher, otherwise he became unclean. But the Lord, the Rabbi of Israel, says: “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man.”

The habit of washing hands before eating is also a typically Jewish usage. It appears in the Bible. It is mentioned here at least (Matthew 15:2). They wash their hands because they know that their hands are defiled.

Matthew 15:20

These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

It may defile the body, perhaps, but not the man himself, not his true being. A man is defiled by that which comes out of the mouth, says Matthew 15:11.

Matthew 15:12

Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

The Pharisees had taken offence – that is what the word means.

Matthew 15:13

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

That is a very sharp word. They can take offence at that as well. The Lord Jesus simply says: “My heavenly Father has not planted those Pharisees. Pharisaism is not a plant or fruit of Scripture or of my heavenly Father; therefore it will in any case be rooted up.” That is a very simple truth. Of course those men stumble at that. They had planted, but it will be rooted up.

This is a simple, general Biblical truth: all that is men’s work will be burned up in the fire – even if it is the founding of a church denomination. That is so, is it not? If it is man’s work, it will be broken down. Even Gamaliel – himself a Pharisee – knew that (Acts 5:34–39). He said, about the work of the apostles: if it is the work of the Lord, we cannot stop it; and if it is not the work of the Lord, it will fall apart of itself. That is what the Lord says here. Are they offended at it? Do they stumble? Well then, they will be rooted up.

Matthew 15:14

Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

“Leave them be” is what that means in plain language. It is a pity for the blind. The blind stumble. If they were not blind, they would not stumble at the stone of stumbling. If they had allowed their eyes to be opened by the Lord Himself, they would not have fallen over the Stone. So now only the blind leaders are to fall, so that the blind who are being led may yet come to the Lord. That is the simple thought.

Matthew 15:15

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

Peter was one of those who thought for himself and listened badly. He knew exactly what to say – at least, he thought so. He was always speaking, but he listened poorly and poorly understood what was going on.

> Matthew 15:16
> And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

Is it really so difficult, after all that has happened, after all that has been said, to understand these things?

> Matthew 15:17
> Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

“The draught” is simply a polite word for the lavatory – and that is again a polite word. We have invented so many words for it because people do not find the straightforward ones “nice enough”. The Lord says it is decent enough, for there that which would defile a man is cast out again. If there is anything that might defile a man and it comes in through the mouth, do not worry about it, Peter. It will come out again – in secret.

> Matthew 15:18–19
> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.
> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Out of the heart words proceed. Most of what is named here in this list has directly to do with the tongue and with speaking. The other things are indirectly connected with it.

> Matthew 15:20
> These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Here it is said that we would do better to restrain the tongue than to wash the hands before eating. That would already remove a large part of the pollution – and that is exactly the point. That is what the Lord Jesus sets out here: the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart. “Evil thoughts” are there – and, in general, that is simply unbelief. Small children do not yet have evil thoughts, and that is why they believe. As soon as they begin to have evil thoughts, they no longer believe, for evil thoughts are those of, “Yes, that is what is said, but is it really so?” Out of their heart comes unbelief. The things listed here are expressions of unbelief. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Generally, it is full of unbelief and everything that goes with it. That is consuming; it burns and does damage – that is what the Lord Jesus explains here.

According to James 3:6 the tongue defiles the whole body, because through that tongue sin is practised and even multiplied, brought outwards. It “setteth on fire the course of nature”, that is, the wheel of our existence. The word “our” is not there. “Birth” is there, but “birth” here is not the translation of the normal word for birth or begetting, gennaō, but it is the word genesis – “becoming”, “origin”. The course of our becoming. Genesis is synonymous with the Hebrew word tôldôth, translated “generations”. It stands for the history of a person, his development, his

life’s course – or sometimes for the account of that life’s course. The “wheel of nature”, as it is translated here, is simply the course of life as things come to be. It “setteth on fire the course of nature”: that is, the way things go in life, and in our life, is in fact disturbed, burned, set on fire by the tongue. The wheel upon which our history runs – in short, the course of things in our life – is disturbed, set ablaze, by the tongue: by all the gossip, as we would put it, by all the idle talk. It ends up dominating our life, but then in a negative way. And that same tongue, it says in James 3:6, “is set on fire of hell”.
In the Authorised Version the word “hell” is usually the translation of hades, that is, the underworld – basically simply the realm of the dead. It is quite a neutral term, just as the word “heaven” is a neutral term. “Heaven” is all that is above the earth, and “hades” is all that is beneath the earth. That word is not used here. Here it is not hades, but gehenna. Gehenna is not even Greek, but a transliteration from Hebrew: Ge-Hinnom. That is the name of the valley of Hinnom, the valley which served as the rubbish-burning place of Jerusalem, beneath Jerusalem – in short: the lake of fire.
That fire of the tongue comes from death, indeed from hell – that is, from the lake of fire, from destruction itself, from perdition. The point here is that this working of corruption and perdition reaches right up to our tongue, and our tongue spreads it further. Our tongue propagates it.

James 3:7–8
For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:
But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
“All nature” means something like “the whole of nature”, really “every kind of nature”, “everything that is natural”. All animals are tamed and have been tamed or brought under control by man – but the tongue no man can tame. Human nature rules over animal nature, but human nature is not able to control its own tongue, a part of its own nature, mind you.
“Venom” is simply poison. Venom has to do with the veins – that which comes into the veins of men, poison, which then infects and defiles the whole body. It is called “serpent’s venom”. Serpent’s venom comes out of the mouth of the serpent. The organs we use for speaking – the tongue, and also the teeth and the lips – those very things are also the things out of which that poison comes. The poison from the serpent’s mouth is, of course, a picture of all the evil that is brought about by the word of the serpent – in short, simply by unbelief.
Usually, when in the Authorised Version the word hell is used, it translates hades – the underworld, basically just the realm of the dead. It is a fairly neutral term, just as the word heaven is a neutral term. “Heaven” is everything that is above the earth, and “hades” is everything that is beneath the earth. That word is not used here. Here it is not hades but gehenna. Gehenna is not even Greek, but a transliteration from the Hebrew Ge-Hinnom. That is the name of the valley of Hinnom, the valley which served as the rubbish incinerator of Jerusalem, below Jerusalem – in short: the lake of fire.

James 3:9
Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.
That is, of course, the same Person. We bless God, who is the Father. Then we say: “Ah, but then surely the tongue is tamed?” No, that is exactly the point. Now the tongue goes one way, and then it goes the other. That tongue does two completely different things. The serpent I just mentioned does not for nothing have a forked tongue. On one side we bless God and the Father, and on the other side we curse with the tongue men who are made after the similitude of God. Instead of the tongue bringing man to God, often the opposite happens – and that even out of the mouth of believers. That can happen, and that is why it is such a difficult matter, and why James spends so much time on it.

James 3:10
Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My q, these things ought not so to be.
Verse 9 is not saying that believers bless God and unbelievers curse men. No, it says, “Out of the same mouth.” It should not be so, but it does happen. James does not even forbid it, for he is probably allergic to law as well. Forbidding has no use in any case, for it cannot in fact be prevented by a prohibition. He merely states that it ought not to be so.

James 3:11
Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?
A spring is a vein of water beneath the surface of the earth. James asks: does two kinds of water come out of one spring? It is not both sweet and bitter. If both come from one source, it is in any case bitter. It may be a bit less bitter, but it remains bitter. It mixes. It is not two distinct types. Water ought to be sweet.

James 3:12
Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.
That cannot be. The mouth is that fountain. Something wells up out of it. That vein is, of course, the heart, because out of the heart, via the mouth, come those things of which we have just read in Matthew 15.

> Matthew 15:18–19
> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.
> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

If we believe with the heart, then from our mouth there ought not to come such bitter water, but sweet, living water, that “shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

Psalm 150:6
Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

That breath is our breath of life. It is the spirit or life that has been breathed into us. We live by that life – but that life is meant to be used to glorify God. “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD.” “Life” and “praise” are concepts that essentially belong together. In that same cluster fits also “love”. To live, to love, to laud – all belong together. “To lave” belongs there too: that is, to drink of the Word. All these words speak of what we ought to do with our life, what life is for – namely, to receive the Word of God and to reproduce it again, with as result: oneness, that is, love.

Wise and understanding

James 3:13 connects directly with James 3:1. Verses 2–12 form a kind of parenthesis, a section inserted into the flow. This passage gives commentary on the power or might of the tongue. Then verse 13 returns to verse 1: “Be not many masters, my brethren…”

James 3:13

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

Someone who is wise and endued with knowledge – that is, of course, synonymous – is someone who, out of a good walk, demonstrates his works, and thus his faith. That walk and those works apply to what he says. That is what the previous chapters were about. “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). The first thing that flows out of that is that we also speak. That is a part of our walk. The most important element of our walk is what we say.

Colossians 4:6
Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Salt is, of course, a picture of the Word of God. Our words ought to be the words of God. Our walk begins with the tongue, and with that tongue the whole body is turned about – or other bodies are turned about. The working of wisdom is simply the speaking of wisdom: the bringing forth of the Word of God. That is also what we read in the next verse:

James 3:14

But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

That wisdom is a wisdom of the heart. But if there is something else in the heart – namely bitter envy (jealousy, envy) and strife (a quarrelsome spirit) – those are all expressions of weakness and of perishableness and of the working of death in the natural man, and even in the believer. If one does have that envy and strife in his heart, then he is inclined to lie. He brings in arguments that are not there at all. He invents them on the spot so that he might win the day in a quarrel. The passage expressly warns

against this: “glory not, and lie not against the truth.” Do not place yourself above the truth. This “glorying” is “to set oneself above”.

James 3:15
This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. That is not the wisdom James is speaking about. It is earthly, and not heavenly. It is from beneath. It is “sensual”, says our translation – but literally it is “soulish”. That is the designation of the old man. And then it says it is “devilish”. That too is an unfortunate translation, for it should be “demon-like” – demonic. It does not say “diabolical” (diabolos), but “dæmonic” (from daimonion). It comes from demons (evil spirits). Even a person whom we would never label as demonic stands under the influence of demons – only in that case we do not call it occult, because there is nothing magical or ritual about it. The whole world stands under the influence of “the prince of the power of the air”. In the last instance those are indeed demons. They are the ones who directly influence mankind and “inspire” and animate them.
There can be no doubt that development in the world, and in human life generally, is subject to a plan – but not to God’s plan, and not to man’s own plan either. Man imagines that, but it is not so. He is prey to another plan – the adversary’s plan – and that plan is inspired by demons. It is, in principle, a demonic matter that people quarrel, are envious, and contentious – and it is certainly a demonic thing when Christians are so. It does not come from the Spirit of God. It comes out of the old man, and he stands under the influence of demons.

James 3:16
For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. “Work” here is literally “doing”, “deed”. One does something with the hands – works, as other translations have it. “Confusion” is a fine word, but it is the translation of “Babel”. “Babel” is not written here, of course, for Babel is Hebrew, but it is the same concept. It is about the working of Babel – the working in man and among the nations, as it already was in the days of Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar, and as it will be in the days when Babel will be the capital of the world. Confusion – because men are led away from the Truth. Only the Truth can make one. To do violence to the Truth is absolutely the way of the world, the way of the demons, and therefore the way of Satan. The Truth is Christ. From a believer it may be expected that he knows that Truth. There, in that Truth, is no confusion but unity.
Even when we do not fully understand that Truth, we still find one another in our seeking of the Truth. We find one another, we become one, in the seeking of the Truth – in our focus upon the Lord Jesus. In Romans we read that we are to be “likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus” (Romans 15:5); that our minds should be set upon the same Centre. Where we desire to understand the Truth, where we seek Him, we meet each other and there is unity. But where there is envy and strife, there is confusion and every evil deed. In seeking the lie one never finds each other. That is why there is a warning that the believer should not fall

into that trap. The believer ought to have his eyes set on Christ – and in James that comes to expression in the expectation of the revelation of Christ, for everything is moving towards that.
If we speak with one another, if we use words, we must see to it that people understand what it is about. That is the power of the word. If we do not, then we misuse the tongue. Then we use that tongue only to draw attention to ourselves, to establish our own power, or to insult others. That is what is said here – and that is not wise. Attention is drawn to the danger of this, for it is not harmless! It leads to deception and confusion. Hence the warning.

James 3:17
But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.
If we do not know what Christ has done, if we do not know what it means that He dwells in our hearts, then nothing will come of that wisdom which is from above. If we do not know that Christ lives in our hearts and that these things are so, then nothing will come of the love of Christ in us either. That is the whole point. We must be oriented to this wisdom which is from above – and the result will be sincerity, without hypocrisy. Believers ought to be without hypocrisy – honest – in the first place directed towards God. We must be honest before Him; otherwise nothing will come of that wisdom which is from above. If you are not honest, you will never find wisdom. In the second place we ought also to be without hypocrisy towards one another.
The result of that will be that the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace.

James 3:18
And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.
Those who make peace are those who accept this wisdom from above and, if need be, pass it on. The result will be peace. That will not be gratefully received by a world characterised by conflict. All the ambition of the natural man is always directed towards displacing someone else. People are jealous of each other – that is the envy which James 4 also speaks about. When we make ourselves dependent upon God and upon His wisdom, the result will be peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with our brothers and sisters. Not peace with unbelievers, of course, for then the conflict comes with all who have a wisdom of their own. That is also the importance of studying Scripture, for in that way we receive that wisdom which is from above.

> 2 Timothy 3:16
> All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

All Scripture is “God-breathed” – from above – and is profitable for… the whole building up of our person and of our life depends on what God has written down in His Word.

James 4 : 1
From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?
The translators have put certain words in italics because they are not in the original text. It does not really matter, for the sense remains the same.
The question, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” is answered simply and directly: they come “even of your lusts that war in your members”. “Members” means the body, the bodily limbs. It is in those members that these lusts wage war.
There is conflict in our body, in ourselves, within our very being. I do not mean only arms and legs, but also the mind – our thinking – as it functions in our body. Every natural man knows that inward conflict: on the one hand he would like to do this, yet on the other hand he does something else. (bibletools.org)
In any case, it is the expression of the struggle which is always present in man – and in the believer – although here James is primarily pointing to the natural man and the thinking of the natural man. He goes on to say that those “wars”, those fightings, in other words war and conflict, arise from the lusts that are in man as such.
Those fightings and wars are carried on first and foremost by means of the tongue. That is to say: it begins in the heart, and then it comes out through the tongue, and so the conflict is also conducted outwardly.

James 4 : 2
Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.
Here these lusts, these desires, appear. This craving is really one of the principal sins of man. He lusts and must “achieve” something.
Nowadays it is taught – even as a so-called Christian virtue – that man ought to “develop himself” and moreover should aim at something lofty in this world. It is said that man has received certain gifts at birth from God, and that he therefore has the responsibility to develop those gifts.
But that is not so. What it is really about is that man should give everything up and hand it back to his Creator, in order to exchange it for a new creation – and that new creation is then to be developed. The point is that Christ should be formed in us, not that we should cultivate our own natural qualities, but that the very characteristics of God Himself should be developed in us.
Man’s craving leads to nothing, as Ecclesiastes teaches. You had better give it up at once, and exchange it for what God works in you. Spiritual things you never lose.
It is not about the development of the old man, but about the development of the new man. The development of the old man is nothing other than plain humanism: preaching man, preaching the good qualities of man, the development of man, the improvement of man. It is a satanic doctrine that a man should improve himself, that by his own striving, by his own works, he ought to better himself. That is not so. He must give himself up. That is precisely the opposite.

James repeats:
James 4 : 2
Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.
People long for something which proves to be unattainable. Many philosophies and ideologies are built on that. A crowd of people lusts and has not. That mass is set in motion by others who promise them that they will, at last, receive what they desire. Of course, they never do, because they must keep on moving.
“Ye envy” – that is, you are jealous. That is the misery of man. Wars are fought for this. Battles are waged: “yet ye have not”. That for which men strive, they do not possess. And James also tells us why: “because ye ask not”.
And the very next words are: “Ye ask…” (James 4:3). So the text really says: “because ye ask not. Ye ask…” In other words, they do pray – but not rightly.

James 4 : 3
Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.
To pray is nothing else than to place oneself in dependence upon God, “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”, from whom comes “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17).
All good giving is from Him. Prayer is dependence on the gifts that God gives, not dependence on one’s own talents, capacities, and powers, but dependence on the power God gives. It is not about our own life, but about the life of God – or, if you will, the life of Christ – in us.
That includes also a dependence on what God does not give. That is to say: insofar as He gives, it is good; and if He does not give, that is good as well. There is a limit there.
All believers have spiritual gifts. These are specific gifts for the edifying of the Church in general, that is, the building up of the Body of Christ. Those gifts differ. One has more glory than another. The believer is confronted with the fact that there is a difference – God makes differences, and we shall have to accept that. One can more than another; one is called to more than another. The difference is simply there.
A believer in particular ought to place himself in dependence upon God. When someone claims to be a believer and does not live in dependence upon God, I have my doubts.
The apostle does not say, “You will certainly receive what you ask if only you pray.” He says that the whole attitude of life is wrong.
In the end it comes to this: that we should not strive after certain things, that we should not even exert ourselves to attain certain things, simply because such things are not meant for the believer at all. It is sometimes better that a believer does not reach a certain position in the world; he would get into great trouble through it.
If one lives in dependence on the Lord, then one is not busy trying to achieve something oneself. Then one does not have a personal

“prognosis”. I know it is difficult, in modern society, to live without some sort of plan for the future, yet that is precisely the mark of a believer. He does not have his own plan. He will see what God gives.
And that is exactly what this chapter speaks about: “whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow” (James 4:14).
“Because ye ask not” does not mean they never hold a prayer-meeting, but that they do not make their whole life dependent on Him.
Sometimes I have the impression that so many prayer-meetings are needed precisely because people do not make their lives dependent on Him. They have shut God out of their everyday life; they live that themselves. Only for a few special points – which they cannot manage – they occasionally lay something before the Lord. It could be like that. I do not say it always is, but we do run that risk: we keep certain items we cannot solve ourselves, and those the Lord must then fix for us; the rest we handle on our own.
But it ought to be that our whole life depends on the Lord. Not just for certain points, not for a “list”. It is not about a particular hour in the week, but about a way of life, an attitude of heart, our orientation. If we have that, a prayer-meeting may indeed flow from it. But let us not turn it round and imagine that if we present ourselves to the Lord for one hour in the week, we have thereby fulfilled this condition.
They did pray, but they prayed “amiss”, as is clear from “that ye may consume it upon your lusts”. Apparently they pray for things they would like to have for the sake of their own lusts, their own ideas.
“Lust” is not always as negative as we tend to think. Lusts are simply the desires we have by nature. The point is that we should live in dependence upon Him, and that our wishes should not spring from those natural desires. Our desires ought rather to be directed to Him. Those are not our own lusts, but the life of Christ in us.
We lay that before Him, and He knows better than anyone what we need for that. We must then be willing to accept what He gives.
The apostle really says: “You do pray; but suppose the Lord were to give you what you ask – you would spend it upon your lusts.” It would serve the gratification of the flesh instead of being at the service of the Creator Himself.
That is why some prayers are not answered. God does not consider it good to give you what you ask, for whatever reason; He decides that Himself. He knows you better than you know yourself.
We believe that God is the One who knows us and knows what we have need of, “for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matthew 6:8), and that He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20).

God in the centre
James 4 : 4
Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

An adulterer or an adulteress is one who is unfaithful to his or her partner. The partner of the believer is the Lord.
If we ask that Lord for things for our old man, that is a matter of adultery. We are joined to Him on the basis of our new birth, precisely because we have become a new creation, because we have received new life.
If we then come to Him for things that belong to the old creation, that is adultery. Then something else stands at the centre of our lives. We want to use the one in order to serve the other.
But the Lord has no interest in that old creation; He does have interest in the development of a new creation, which He has already brought into being in Christ.
“Friendship” is “being bound together with”. To be bound together with the world is enmity against God. In the same measure in which we are bound to the world, we are separated from Him.
Conversely: it is impossible to be bound with Him – to live out of His hand – and at the same time to be, on the other side, a friend of the world. That is adultery, and the two cannot go together.
“World” here is simply kosmos, the material world, the old creation. Whoever wants to be a friend of that is set as an enemy of God. For kosmos is the old creation. But one who is a friend of God – especially in this present time, since the resurrection of Christ – belongs to a new creation.

James 4 : 5
Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?
“Envy” here means jealousy. This is a somewhat difficult quotation. At first sight it appears to be a quote from the Old Testament. The translators have noted Numbers 11:29 in the margin, but you need a very lively imagination to see it there.
Apparently this is not a literal citation of one particular verse, but a kind of summary of the general tenor of Scripture. You will not find this sentence itself in the Old Testament, but you do find the thought: that when the Spirit of God dwells in a man, that man is no longer jealous. Jealousy belongs to the lusts and desires of the old man.
The Spirit of God is not jealous; He does not “lust to envy”.
I think, for instance, of David, who was anointed to be king. The anointing is a picture of the outpouring of the Spirit of God. David did not want so terribly to be king. He was the youngest of eight, and was out with the sheep. No one thought of him. He was not an ambitious man. But he was called, and he was anointed.
Afterwards he simply went back to the sheep. If the Lord wanted him to be king, then the Lord must see to it that he became king; David did nothing to bring it about. David thought: If it must be so, the Lord Himself will do it. And so it went. David was not ambitious, yet he did become king.

James 4 : 6
But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

God calls precisely humble people, people without pretensions.
The apostle Paul was, by nature, proud and self-confident, and first had to suffer – figuratively speaking – complete shipwreck, in order then, as the "little man" Paul (for that is what his name means: small), to enter upon a career which the Lord had marked out for him. When he had given everything up, then the Lord used him.
The Spirit of God is never jealous. The Spirit of God in the believer does not drive him to elbow his way forward in order to secure a place for himself in "Christian" or "evangelical" circles, or the like. You do not need to be up front. They do not all need to be at the front, like Diotrephes in the church of which John speaks in his third epistle: "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them" (3 John 9).
They insist on being first; they must by all means be chosen as elder, or onto the church council, or whatever the structure may be nowadays. Those are ambitious people who must be something, but that is not the work of God's Spirit.
When I read the Bible, I always see that those whom God clearly called – where there can be no doubt – were exactly those who did not need to be in front, and who would rather not, who did not feel up to it and said, "Lord, please take someone else in my place."
Moses said that several times. I think also of Elijah, of Paul, and of Peter, who had really ruined things after his denial – yet he is restored and given a place. We would say that such people are unfit, but God calls them, precisely the humble, because God gives grace to the humble.
Paul says that "my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9), not the other way round. God gives grace to the humble and uses them. He is able in any case to reach His goal.
The humble are those who have seen that nothing can be expected from themselves. To them, and through them, it is shown that God is able to perfect His power in the weakest man, so that it is clear that it is not that man's power, but the power of God.
After all, this present dispensation is meant to be a demonstration of God's grace. That is why He uses people who, in themselves, cannot do anything. If anything comes of it, it can only have been by the power of God.

James 4 : 7
Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
Acknowledge, then, that He is above you – that is what it means. To submit is to assign ourselves a lower place than the one to whom we submit.
It is one or the other: you are either submitted to the devil, or submitted to God. Hence it says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil…" – in fact that is the same thing, the same act.
The result will be that "he will flee from you." To suffer from the devil comes from not submitting ourselves to God. That is what it says here: "he will flee from you."

As long as we are busy with our own works, we shall suffer opposition from everyone, because everyone is busy opposing us. But so long as we submit ourselves to God, we shall have no trouble from the devil.

James 4 : 8

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" – but it is our responsibility to go to Him, and then to live in fellowship with Him.

This sentence confirms what we said on verse 1, namely that this epistle is in the first place written to believing Jews. Drawing near to God is a very familiar thought in Judaism, because it is a variant of the Hebrew word for "offering", korban, which literally means "to draw near". One draws near to God by the sacrifice. Hence, when someone drew near to God in the Temple, he could never come empty-handed; he always had to bring an offering. Something had to be presented.

And what do we offer? The text says: "Draw nigh to God." Who then is it that draws near? Paul says in Romans 12:1:

> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The sacrifice is that we present our bodies. Offer yourself to God, in all lowliness, and He will draw near to us. Through a sacrifice one comes to God. In the first instance we have the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the sacrifice; and insofar as we now sacrifice, we simply offer ourselves.

"Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded!" – that is a parallelism. To cleanse is to purify. Hands and hearts both relate to our life. Hands speak of our works; hearts speak of our thoughts. The hands stand for the outward man, the heart for the inward. If the one is cleansed, the other must be cleansed as well.

So it is about the cleansing of both the hands – in connection with our works – and the hearts, in connection with faith. The "sinners" are the "double minded", the same people as in James 1:5–8, who hold to two different philosophies or beliefs, and are "unstable in all [their] ways". The same thing is really said twice, for it is addressed to the double minded. Twice they are told: cleanse yourselves from the old man.

We must submit ourselves to God – and that is one thing. That is not two different things. It is not double-minded, but one.

There is a parallel between James 1, where it is stated briefly, and James 3–4, where it is expanded. Chapter 4 comes after a more detailed explanation in James 2 and 3 of the link between faith and works, and therefore between faith and what comes out of the mouth.

In chapter 2 it was faith and what the hands do – "faith and works". Then it is faith and what the mouth does – the sins of the tongue: what comes directly out of the heart. After the apostle has explained both these things, he returns again in chapter 4. He says: it all comes forth from the heart; but you ought to submit yourselves to God, to be lowly; then you will not

have such a big mouth, nor such lofty thoughts about the works you think you can do for the Lord.
What is pleasing to God is that we believe His Word. He who took the trouble to write some twelve hundred pages to reveal Himself to us, can best be served by our submitting to that revelation, and by searching that Word. That is the point.
That will undoubtedly occupy our hearts, and from those hearts there will then be an outworking in our deeds, and certainly also in our speech. The things that we then do, and the things that we then say, come forth from the heart – but in that case the heart is filled with the Word of God.
If we draw nigh to God, we are thereby cleansed. It does not say that we must do two things – draw nigh to God and cleanse ourselves. Under the Law, one was reckoned to be cleansed by "the blood of bulls and of goats" (Hebrews 9:13; 10:4). That is typology, for in reality that blood did not truly cleanse; but as far as the Law was concerned, one was clean.

> For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:
> How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13–14)

The one is a picture of the other. The apostle John says it a little differently in 1 John 1:7:
But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.
We are cleansed by the living Christ; by the blood – that is, by the life – of Christ. All we have to do is draw nigh to God. To walk in the light with Him is the same as drawing nigh to Him and walking the same path with Him. Then we walk with Him in the light as He is in the light; then we have drawn nigh to God, and we are cleansed.
In Ephesians we see that Christ cleanses His Church. What is expected of us is submission.

> And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

A few verses further on we read that one consequence of this is that Christ cleanses us:

> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
> That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (Ephesians 5:25–26)

The life of Christ is that Spirit. If the Spirit – the life – of Christ is in us, and we are filled with Him, then at the same time we are cleansed by Him. Christ cleanses the Church "with the washing of water by the word". He does it; we do not.
Again: the hands have to do with outward things; the hearts with inward things. Together, it is the cleansing of the whole man, as the Epistle to the Hebrews also teaches, that we are completely cleansed and completely sanctified.

James 4 : 9–10

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

If we say, “There is written, Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4), someone else will answer, “Yes, but here it says, Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep.” That is in James. The question is: to whom is it spoken?

In Philippians, “Rejoice” is addressed to those who are in much tribulation – that is, to those who suffer with Christ, those who have the same mind as Christ, the lowly mind. To them it is said, “Rejoice,” because we have learned of Christ that “he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him…” (Philippians 2:8–9). So if we are humbled, Paul says, that is a reason to rejoice, for then we shall be exalted.

The “laughter” in verse 9 is the laughter of arrogance – mockery. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord” can only be said to the proud; to those who have already humbled themselves you cannot say, “Humble yourselves before the Lord” – they have done so already.

To the proud it is also said, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep,” for if you are proud, you are in a miserable state – at least from God’s viewpoint. When affliction is present, it does not seem to be a matter of joy (Hebrews 12:11).

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Yet, when that affliction is past, it “worketh” something:

> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; (2 Corinthians 4:17)

The humiliation itself is no joy, but its result is joy indeed, because the outcome is glory. In proportion as we suffer with Christ, or for the sake of Christ, we shall also be glorified.

“Be afflicted…” is thus said to the proud; but “Rejoice” is said to those who, like Christ Himself, have humbled themselves, and who are being exalted by the Lord.

Then James returns to his main subject.

James 4 : 11

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

To speak evil of one another is nothing but pride. The reason almost everyone gossips is that almost everyone is proud. To make that pride good in practice they push others into the ground, so that they alone remain standing. People do not gossip so much in order to humiliate the other, as to place themselves above him. Even brethren do that.

Here James refers to a law which he has already touched on, and which is simply this: that we should love God (and our neighbour). The neighbour

of the believer is Christ – and therefore, also, all who are in Christ. Our brothers and sisters are our neighbours because they are in Christ.
Paul says in Ephesians 4:25:

> Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

And in Colossians 3:9:

> Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

To believers, then, it is said that we should not lie to one another, because we are one another's neighbours.
The Law says we must not bear false witness against our neighbour (Exodus 20:16), and also that we must love our neighbour (Leviticus 19:18). Since our neighbour is, in the first place, Christ, and in the second, our brothers and sisters, it conflicts with this summary of the Law when we speak evil of one another. It is against the Law; and if one acts against the Law, he is proud, because he places himself above the Law.
"To judge" here means to pass sentence, to declare someone guilty. In the Authorised Version the word "judge" often carries that sense: not so much "to weigh things", as to pronounce judgement.
He who passes judgement on his brother thereby also passes judgement on the Law. He places himself above the Law, which says: "Thou shalt love him." If one nevertheless condemns his brother, declaring him guilty, he places himself above the Law, and thus judges the Law itself. And that is sheer pride.
A "doer of the law" is one who lives under the Law. A judge stands above the Law. A judge is indeed expected to keep the Law, but his task is also to interpret the Law. When one acts contrary to the Law, one places oneself above it; one ceases to be a doer of the Law, and becomes a judge. One stands over it.
When we speak evil of our brother, we are at any rate acting contrary to the Law. Although we are not under the Law, it is quite true that the general thrust of the Law is applied to us in the New Testament when it says that we should love our neighbour. That neighbour is the fellow-believer. "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Galatians 5:14).

James 4 : 12

There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?
"There is one lawgiver." In Greek there is no separate word for "a" or "an"; "one" is the cardinal number. There is a link here between "judge" and "lawgiver". Verse 11 said, "Thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge," and then verse 12 adds, "There is one lawgiver…" We might have expected "judge" again, but we read "lawgiver", because in Scripture the Judge is the Lawgiver, and the Lawgiver the Judge. In the last resort that is God.
There are not many lawgivers. We are not lawgivers. There is only one who will judge another and pronounce sentence, and that is God.

Even if we are convinced that someone else is wrong, that does not necessarily have any direct consequence for the practical affairs of our life. That is the point. We are not the ones who must condemn others; we are the ones who must submit ourselves to God.
Here we are at the same thought as in Romans 14:4:

> Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

A believer is not answerable to every other believer, but to the Lord. If any judging has to be done, it is the Lord who does it. It is not our task to do so.
The old principle for Israel still applies to us:
The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. (Exodus 14:14)
Not: “and ye shall help Me”, or “ye shall pray about it”, but: “ye shall hold your peace.”

James 4 : 13
Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:
This verse should really not be read first and foremost within the framework of our everyday circumstances, but within that of the coming dispensation, in which the epistle will be directly applicable, for there the uncertainty of life is even greater.
Our editions put as a heading, “The uncertainty of life”, but in the next dispensation that uncertainty will be far greater than in ours. There will be persecution and tribulation and restrictions for the believers. In any case, we have learned that of those believers it is said that they will not be able to buy or sell. In other words, restrictions will be placed upon them in trade – and that is the very subject here.
James reckons that a statement about “to day or to morrow” is a proud statement. “To–day or to–morrow we will go into such a city…” – he says: you do not know that at all. Such speech implies that we control the circumstances, and that is not so, for, as verse 14 says, “ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”

James 4 : 14
Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.
A vapour is almost formless; it is constantly changing shape, and suddenly it is gone. We are really talking about mist, and that is all very temporary. Vapour is a temporary thickening of something that normally cannot be seen at all. For a moment it is visible, and then it is gone again. Such is human life.
In Genesis 2:6, when man and life upon the earth are being described, we read:

> But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

That “mist” is the Hebrew word ’ēd or ’ad; and “Adam” – man – is that same word with one letter added. Man is compared to a vapour. He is there for a brief time, he takes on a shape that is constantly changing, and then at some point he disappears again. Sometimes he arrives in the world without anyone really noticing; often enough he also leaves the world after everyone has long forgotten him.
In 1 Peter 1, Peter also speaks of the perishableness of life and its uncertainty; he does not say that it is like a vapour, but like grass. He cites Psalm 103:

> As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. (Psalm 103:15)

It just withers away.

James 4 : 15
For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.
This ought to be the thought of the believer: “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” That is what people used to express with Deo volente – “if God wills”.
That does not mean, “if God Himself takes the initiative to do this”, but rather, “if God permits it”, for if God does not will it, He will undoubtedly prevent it. It is always, “if God allows it”.
We do not know what the day of to-morrow will bring us. We only know that the Lord leads us; and the rest we leave to Him, having humbled ourselves and committed ourselves to His guidance.
James 4 : 8
Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.
“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” – but it is our responsibility to go to Him, and then to live in fellowship with Him.
This sentence confirms what we said on verse 1, namely that this epistle is in the first place written to believing Jews. Drawing near to God is a very familiar thought in Judaism, because it is a variant of the Hebrew word for “offering”, korban, which literally means “to draw near”. One draws near to God by the sacrifice. Hence, when someone drew near to God in the Temple, he could never come empty-handed; he always had to bring an offering. Something had to be presented.
And what do we offer? The text says: “Draw nigh to God.” Who then is it that draws near? Paul says in Romans 12:1:

> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The sacrifice is that we present our bodies. Offer yourself to God, in all lowliness, and He will draw near to us. Through a sacrifice one comes to God. In the first instance we have the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the sacrifice; and insofar as we now sacrifice, we simply offer ourselves.
“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded!” – that is a parallelism. To cleanse is to purify. Hands and hearts both relate to our life. Hands speak of our works; hearts speak of our

thoughts. The hands stand for the outward man, the heart for the inward. If the one is cleansed, the other must be cleansed as well.
So it is about the cleansing of both the hands – in connection with our works – and the hearts, in connection with faith. The “sinners” are the “double minded”, the same people as in James 1:5–8, who hold to two different philosophies or beliefs, and are “unstable in all [their] ways”. The same thing is really said twice, for it is addressed to the double minded. Twice they are told: cleanse yourselves from the old man.
We must submit ourselves to God – and that is one thing. That is not two different things. It is not double-minded, but one.
There is a parallel between James 1, where it is stated briefly, and James 3–4, where it is expanded. Chapter 4 comes after a more detailed explanation in James 2 and 3 of the link between faith and works, and therefore between faith and what comes out of the mouth.
In chapter 2 it was faith and what the hands do – “faith and works”. Then it is faith and what the mouth does – the sins of the tongue: what comes directly out of the heart. After the apostle has explained both these things, he returns again in chapter 4. He says: it all comes forth from the heart; but you ought to submit yourselves to God, to be lowly; then you will not have such a big mouth, nor such lofty thoughts about the works you think you can do for the Lord.
What is pleasing to God is that we believe His Word. He who took the trouble to write some twelve hundred pages to reveal Himself to us, can best be served by our submitting to that revelation, and by searching that Word. That is the point.
That will undoubtedly occupy our hearts, and from those hearts there will then be an outworking in our deeds, and certainly also in our speech. The things that we then do, and the things that we then say, come forth from the heart – but in that case the heart is filled with the Word of God.
If we draw nigh to God, we are thereby cleansed. It does not say that we must do two things – draw nigh to God and cleanse ourselves. Under the Law, one was reckoned to be cleansed by “the blood of bulls and of goats” (Hebrews 9:13; 10:4). That is typology, for in reality that blood did not truly cleanse; but as far as the Law was concerned, one was clean.

> For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13–14)

The one is a picture of the other. The apostle John says it a little differently in 1 John 1:7:

> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

We are cleansed by the living Christ; by the blood – that is, by the life – of Christ. All we have to do is draw nigh to God. To walk in the light with Him is the same as drawing nigh to Him and walking the same path with Him. Then we walk with Him in the light as He is in the light; then we have drawn nigh to God, and we are cleansed.

In Ephesians we see that Christ cleanses His Church. What is expected of us is submission.

> And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

A few verses further on we read that one consequence of this is that Christ cleanses us:

> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
> That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (Ephesians 5:25–26)

The life of Christ is that Spirit. If the Spirit – the life – of Christ is in us, and we are filled with Him, then at the same time we are cleansed by Him. Christ cleanses the Church "with the washing of water by the word". He does it; we do not.

Again: the hands have to do with outward things; the hearts with inward things. Together, it is the cleansing of the whole man, as the Epistle to the Hebrews also teaches, that we are completely cleansed and completely sanctified.

James 4 : 9–10

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

If we say, "There is written, Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4), someone else will answer, "Yes, but here it says, Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep." That is in James. The question is: to whom is it spoken?

In Philippians, "Rejoice" is addressed to those who are in much tribulation – that is, to those who suffer with Christ, those who have the same mind as Christ, the lowly mind. To them it is said, "Rejoice," because we have learned of Christ that "he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him…" (Philippians 2:8–9). So if we are humbled, Paul says, that is a reason to rejoice, for then we shall be exalted.

The "laughter" in verse 9 is the laughter of arrogance – mockery. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord" can only be said to the proud; to those who have already humbled themselves you cannot say, "Humble yourselves before the Lord" – they have done so already.

To the proud it is also said, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep," for if you are proud, you are in a miserable state – at least from God's viewpoint. When affliction is present, it does not seem to be a matter of joy (Hebrews 12:11).

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Yet, when that affliction is past, it "worketh" something:

> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; (2 Corinthians 4:17)

The humiliation itself is no joy, but its result is joy indeed, because the outcome is glory. In proportion as we suffer with Christ, or for the sake of Christ, we shall also be glorified.
“Be afflicted…” is thus said to the proud; but “Rejoice” is said to those who, like Christ Himself, have humbled themselves, and who are being exalted by the Lord.
Then James returns to his main subject.

James 4 : 11
Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.
To speak evil of one another is nothing but pride. The reason almost everyone gossips is that almost everyone is proud. To make that pride good in practice they push others into the ground, so that they alone remain standing. People do not gossip so much in order to humiliate the other, as to place themselves above him. Even brethren do that.
Here James refers to a law which he has already touched on, and which is simply this: that we should love God (and our neighbour). The neighbour of the believer is Christ – and therefore, also, all who are in Christ. Our brothers and sisters are our neighbours because they are in Christ.
Paul says in Ephesians 4:25:

> Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

And in Colossians 3:9:

> Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

To believers, then, it is said that we should not lie to one another, because we are one another’s neighbours.
The Law says we must not bear false witness against our neighbour (Exodus 20:16), and also that we must love our neighbour (Leviticus 19:18). Since our neighbour is, in the first place, Christ, and in the second, our brothers and sisters, it conflicts with this summary of the Law when we speak evil of one another. It is against the Law; and if one acts against the Law, he is proud, because he places himself above the Law.
“To judge” here means to pass sentence, to declare someone guilty. In the Authorised Version the word “judge” often carries that sense: not so much “to weigh things”, as to pronounce judgement.
He who passes judgement on his brother thereby also passes judgement on the Law. He places himself above the Law, which says: “Thou shalt love him.” If one nevertheless condemns his brother, declaring him guilty, he places himself above the Law, and thus judges the Law itself. And that is sheer pride.
A “doer of the law” is one who lives under the Law. A judge stands above the Law. A judge is indeed expected to keep the Law, but his task is also to interpret the Law. When one acts contrary to the Law, one places oneself above it; one ceases to be a doer of the Law, and becomes a judge. One stands over it.

When we speak evil of our brother, we are at any rate acting contrary to the Law. Although we are not under the Law, it is quite true that the general thrust of the Law is applied to us in the New Testament when it says that we should love our neighbour. That neighbour is the fellow-believer. “He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Galatians 5:14).

James 4 : 12

There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

“There is one lawgiver.” In Greek there is no separate word for “a” or “an”; “one” is the cardinal number. There is a link here between “judge” and “lawgiver”. Verse 11 said, “Thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge,” and then verse 12 adds, “There is one lawgiver…” We might have expected “judge” again, but we read “lawgiver”, because in Scripture the Judge is the Lawgiver, and the Lawgiver the Judge. In the last resort that is God.

There are not many lawgivers. We are not lawgivers. There is only one who will judge another and pronounce sentence, and that is God.

Even if we are convinced that someone else is wrong, that does not necessarily have any direct consequence for the practical affairs of our life. That is the point. We are not the ones who must condemn others; we are the ones who must submit ourselves to God.

Here we are at the same thought as in Romans 14:4:

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Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

This verse should really not be read first and foremost within the framework of our everyday circumstances, but within that of the coming dispensation, in which the epistle will be directly applicable, for there the uncertainty of life is even greater.

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James 4 : 14
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As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. (Psalm 103:15)
It just withers away.

James 4 : 15
For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.
This ought to be the thought of the believer: “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” That is what people used to express with Deo volente – “if God wills”.
That does not mean, “if God Himself takes the initiative to do this”, but rather, “if God permits it”, for if God does not will it, He will undoubtedly prevent it. It is always, “if God allows it”.
We do not know what the day of to-morrow will bring us. We only know that the Lord leads us; and the rest we leave to Him, having humbled ourselves and committed ourselves to His guidance.
If someone has humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, then in his speech (think of the tongue in James 3), in his words, he ought to take account of that, and say: Deo volente – “if the Lord will”. Whoever does not do that is glorying in his own pride.

James 4 : 16

But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

All boasting that springs from pride is evil. There is a boasting which is not out of pride:

> He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:31)

For we are dependent on Him. He is the One who gives us life, and by whose grace we live. We had lost everything, but God has graced us in Christ. If therefore we boast, it can never be in ourselves, for:

> Where is boasting then? It is excluded. (Romans 3:27)

There is nothing for us to beat our chests about. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” That is the point. Let us open ourselves to that; that is humility. That is one side. On the other side, it is also very realistic to do so, for we who believe know that God is almighty and that He

> …worketh all things together for good

in general, and especially “to them that love God” (Romans 8:28). “For good in general” is not “for the good of man in general”, but for God’s good purpose, and therefore it also works together for good to those who believe in Him.

Verse 17 is, in a way, the conclusion of the preceding chapters.

James 4 : 17

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

If it has just been said what doing good is, and one still does not do it, then it is sin. If you do something while you genuinely do not know better, it can hardly be charged to you in the same way; but once you do know better, it can be charged to you. When people act in ignorance, then you get something like, “Lay not this sin to their charge,” or “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Of course, the Word of God is not there in order to leave us in ignorance so that nothing can be imputed to us. On the contrary, the Word of God wants to bring us into the knowledge of all spiritual truth, so that it can indeed be imputed. That is why so many people set themselves against the Word of God and say, “Let it stay closed.” They are afraid of the responsibility they will take on by becoming acquainted with it.

Men are expected to do the good, and what “the good” is, the Lord Himself will determine. In Philippians we read that He is the One who works that out:

> For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

He sets the good works before us and gives us the opportunity to do them. If the Lord gives a task, He also gives the opportunity and the means to carry out that task; and then you are bound to do it. That is the issue here.

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” From these chapters it is clear what doing good is: namely, that the faith we have really comes out into the open in the works we do, in our conduct. More generally, it shows that we submit ourselves to God, to the Lord.

In the first place, this verse applies to a coming dispensation, when it will be demanded of man that he believe – and not only with the heart. It says, “he that believeth”, and also

> …he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. (Matthew 24:13)

When one endures unto the end, one shall be saved and enter into those thousand years upon earth. But if one does not submit himself to the Lord here on earth, how could one, as a reward, enter a Kingdom made up of a whole creation submitted to Christ? If in this life one has not submitted oneself to Him, how should one belong in such a Kingdom of those who are subject to Him? That is a simple truth.
He who does not endure unto the end will therefore evidently not be saved. The next chapter speaks expressly about that.
If you are entangled in fightings and wars, the best thing you can do is get out of them, be humble. You must not submit yourself to the opponent, but to the Lord, who will fight for you. Then it will be all right. Whoever knows that, is expected to do that, otherwise he sins. Then he consciously chooses another side – and no believer, in any dispensation, can do that without consequence.

James 5 : 1–3
Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.
Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.
Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.
It is historically well known that the wealth of the Roman Empire led to its downfall through its own lusts and desires. Most people cannot bear the luxury and therefore just as good that most people do not have that luxury.
“Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days,” the verse says. “The last days” in the Bible is always the designation of the time since the appearance of the Messiah, since the first coming of Christ. In any case, since His death and resurrection the days of this present evil world have been numbered, and with them the days of Satan; and therefore they are called “the last days”. From that time on, a beginning has been made with a new creation, of which Christ is the Firstfruits, and of which we are firstfruits as well. Hence, these days here on earth are in any case the last days.
It has nothing to do with whether there are many or few of them; it means that this is the tail-end of “man’s day” – the time in which man ruled, and with him Satan. It is the end of the age of which Satan is the god. The further we move towards the end of that age, the more emphatically we live in the last days. In the next dispensation, it is all the more the last days, for then the Kingdom of Christ, which is now still hidden, will be manifested.
That men just in the last days should heap up treasure is rather strange. What sense does it make, if you know what is going to happen, to busy

yourself with accumulating wealth? It makes no sense. Precisely because these are the last days, it is certain that such treasure is of a passing nature. When that coming Kingdom of Christ is revealed, there will be a redistribution, so that one will have no use whatever for the treasure amassed beforehand, for it has to be surrendered. There will be a new beginning. The Lord Jesus will gather the nations before Him, divide them, and set them in the land which He has prepared for them.

James 5 : 4
Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.
It is not about someone who is rich for one reason or another, but about covetousness – about riches obtained in an unjust way. That is clear enough, for the Bible does not condemn the rich as such. The rich who have enriched themselves dishonestly have set their trust on their riches instead of on the Lord.
When the rich young ruler came to the Lord, the Lord asked him, too, to exchange his riches for the Lord Himself (Matthew 19:21). This riches is not primarily the earthly riches; the point is that whatever you have on earth – even if it is nothing but your own body – you must give it up. You must give up your life in order to receive another life in its place. If you have many possessions, it becomes much more difficult. All those things you have struggled for your whole life to gain, you must, as a believer, exchange, and you must say that you have enough in the Lord. Hence it is so hard for a rich man to be saved, especially when that wealth is the result of dishonest dealings.
The rich in James 5 ought to weep and howl over the miseries that come upon them, for the misery is that their hoard, their gold and silver, is rusted, and that they themselves shall be eaten up like fire. They come into the judgement. And then it says that this is foolish as well, for they have “heaped treasure together for the last days”. In a sense that applies not only then, but also now. Whatever you accumulate here on earth, you will have to give it up.
These rich have withheld the wages of the labourers – in other words, they have done them wrong, paid them too little. Here we read that such injustices do indeed reach the ears of “the Lord of sabaoth” – that is, the Lord of hosts, the Lord of the multitudes. The Lord of hosts is the Lord of the masses. The Lord is also the Lord of the labourers and of those who have reaped – not only of the employers, but also of the employees. Therefore the Lord comes to judge. Where goods, possessions, and money have ended up in the wrong hands, for whatever reason, the Lord will set those things right.

James 5 : 5
Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.
In older English “pleasantly” or “in pleasure” carries the sense of “luxuriously, self-indulgently”. “Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth”

means that they have lived loosely, done whatever was right in their own eyes. The Greek expression used here occurs only once or twice more in the New Testament, and is translated differently there; in 2 Peter 2:13, for example, it is rendered “to riot in pleasure” or “to count it pleasure to riot in the daytime”.
“Well-pleasures” or “lusts” are the desires of the members, of the body. Luxury and self-indulgence on the earth is therefore the following of those lusts, the satisfying of the needs of the flesh. These rich had the financial means to do so; they were able to support that kind of lifestyle.
“Ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter” shows that it is not primarily about eating and drinking. It does not say, “Ye have fed your bodies,” but, “Ye have nourished your hearts.” The heart is the seat of the feelings. The lusts are connected with the heart. “Ye have nourished your hearts” means that those desires, those natural cravings of man, have been satisfied. That is compared to a feast: “a day of slaughter” is the day on which the fatted calf is killed, a day on which one can indulge oneself. The rich have had the opportunity to indulge themselves in everything their heart desired. And all this has taken place at the expense of those who were wronged – at the expense of “the labourers who have reaped down your fields” and “them which have reaped”.

James 5 : 6
Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.
This is, because of the transition it makes, a very remarkable verse. It forms the link between the riches and lusts of the natural man, and the spiritually minded man who hopes and waits for the return of Christ. That is important, for verse 6 is a difficult verse.
“Ye have condemned and killed…” is said to those rich who have come into miseries, who have withheld wages, and who have lived in luxury. Who is this “just” whom they have killed? To say of the natural man that he is “just” is difficult, for a man is only just if he is a believer.
It does not say, “Ye have killed just men,” but, “Ye have … killed the just.” By the time we have reached page 1163 of our Bible, we really ought to know that when it speaks of the Just One, there is only One – the Messiah Himself. The translators did not believe or see that, and therefore wrote “just” with a small letter; but it should certainly be a capital: the Just One. Here, then, Israel is told that, out of the wealth the nation possessed, they condemned the Lord Jesus.
The situation of “Ye have condemned and killed the Just; and he doth not resist you” has existed for more than nineteen centuries already. All that time, “he doth not resist you”, for the real judgement on the rejection of the Messiah has not yet taken place.
It is a great misunderstanding to say that the judgements which came over Israel were a direct act of God – an active judgement of God on the nation that rejected Him. That cannot be, if only because then the prayer,

> Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34),

of the Lord Himself, would not have been answered. The wrath that has come upon Israel is not an active intervention; it is, in a sense, passive – the result of their unbelief. God has let them go.

If mankind does not want to know the truth, or holds it down in unrighteousness, then the Lord draws back, and wrath results from that. The world is handed over to itself, and that in itself is wrath; but it is not the judgement, nor an active striking on God's part in this world.
Especially in the present dispensation – the "dispensation of the grace of God" – God is not judging (Hebrews 4:16; Romans 5:21); and therefore it says, "he doth not resist you".
God is not the One who persecutes the Jews. Some people imagine that Hitler was an instrument in God's hand to persecute Israel. Such people do not think things through. It is true that the nation as such once rejected the Messiah; but the other nations also did so.

> He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
> He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. (John 1:10–11)

Both Jews and Gentiles rejected Him. Any judgement that has come upon the Jews is connected with their calling, with their special position and striking place in world history and in today's world. Because of that, they have been the target of all kinds of persecutions.
You cannot simply say that those persecutions came because they rejected the Messiah. They come in connection with their rejection of the Messiah, but not as a direct divine reaction to that rejection. There is a connection, but that does not mean that God sent Hitler to persecute them.
The persecution of the Jews fits well into Satan's plan, because he has an interest in the extermination of the Jews. The Jewish people have a special place in God's plan of salvation. If they were eradicated, it would mean that God could not bring His future plan of salvation to fulfilment.
Now the point is this: Israel rejected the Messiah, condemned Him, killed Him; therefore, humility befits Israel – and believing Israel all the more. The Lord does not strive against Israel, although Israel might well have expected the wrath of God, because it rejected its Messiah. The wrath that will come upon Israel in the future will be, first of all, wrath because of their unbelief. Later the same thing will happen with the Gentiles.
That He does not resist them ought to put them to shame, for it is what might have been expected – but has not happened. Precisely that leads to humility. And so we arrive at the conclusion:

James 5 : 7
Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.
The apostle James directs the believers' gaze towards the future. "Have long patience," he says. That has to do with endurance: keeping your courage up for a long time. That must continue until the coming of the Lord.
Scripture itself explains that "longsuffering" is like what the farmer does when he sows in the field. When he starts out as a farmer, he must at the very least buy seed. He then throws it away, and that is exactly what you

ought to do with your riches: only then will it yield a result. Longsuffering is the farmer waiting for the fruit of the earth. He sows in full confidence that the early and latter rain will come, as it says here – that God will "give the increase" (cf. "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." – 1 Corinthians 3:6). We simply wait.
This picture does not apply only to the believers of that time – although then it was exactly one generation – but also in our own day. Longsuffering means that you know it is coming, but you must keep your courage up over a longer period. The Lord expects longsuffering from the believer "unto the coming of the Lord". That is especially the case in the next, the sixth dispensation, in which all these things will be realised; but it is certainly true in this present dispensation, in which we have been waiting about two thousand years for the coming of the Lord.
Whatever the circumstances may be – in our days, but also in the days of the great tribulation – there is but one message: deliverance is accomplished in Christ, and He will be revealed in His own time, in what is called "the coming of the Lord". Hence our long patience.

The Acts period
With this we return to that special feature of these apostolic letters in general: namely, that they were written against the historical background of the Acts-period. That is the period in which the Kingdom of heaven was still being preached directly to Israel – that if Israel would repent, the Messiah would yet appear from heaven to fulfil His prophecies. That was then still being preached.
Afterwards, it was no longer preached – not because it was no longer true, but because we had meanwhile been told that Israel's repentance would be delayed for some time, roughly about two thousand years. Therefore that line of preaching ceases, and the emphasis in the preaching is laid elsewhere – not because the truth has changed (it never changes), but because certain truths are more directly presently relevant than others. The apostle Peter uses the term "the present truth" ("the present truth" – 2 Peter 1:12). That is truth as it relates to the present time. There are also truths which are indeed true, but do not directly touch the present moment.
The epistle of James is therefore written against the background of Acts, when they preached that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand and would be manifested. Precisely because it is written against that background, it becomes directly relevant again in the future days, in which that Kingdom – and the Gospel of that Kingdom – will again be preached. That is the period in which the parousia, the coming of the Lord, is at hand, and in which "the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9).
So we must be very clear that this passage, and especially the end of the epistle, really only comes into its own in the days of the great tribulation. The appearing of the Lord to Israel and to the believers takes place precisely in those days, in the dispensation of the fulness of times (the sixth dispensation). That is the setting in which it should be read.
The time in which this epistle will finally be delivered is the time when the 144,000 sealed out of Israel will preach the Gospel to all nations – the

Gospel of the Kingdom: “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The axe is already laid to the root of the tree. Repent and be baptised, and “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” I put it briefly, but the point is this: it is a time in which men must put their trust in the Lord, that He might then establish His Kingdom on earth. What was promised, they would receive within a foreseeable time.
The principle that what has been promised to us we shall receive in the future applies to every believer of every age, and will continue to apply, even in the seventh dispensation. Even in the Kingdom there will still remain the promise of new heavens and a new earth, for those are not yet present even then. The believer is always “saved in hope”.

James 5 : 8
Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.
“Be ye also patient” – like that farmer. It is a simple picture from the old creation to illustrate a truth concerning the new creation. Be longsuffering. Keep your courage up, for it will all be well.
The heart is especially the seat of faith. “Be patient” and “stablish your hearts” belong together, for the strengthening of the heart has to do with holding fast the faith. Paul said of himself at the end of his course:

> I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7)

The struggle consists in holding fast the truth that everything which God has promised will in fact only be realised in the future. All that we receive now is but an advance on that inheritance to come. That always remains so, for that future is ultimately not even the coming of Christ, nor even the thousand years, but a new creation. That is the fulfilment of all God’s promises, and everything that precedes it is only a foretaste.
From a believer it may be expected that he holds fast the faith and continues to live from that faith. Hence the exhortation:

> Fight the good fight of faith… (1 Timothy 6:12)

<u>Exhortations</u>
We now get a number of “loose exhortations”. They may at first seem somewhat diverse, and we may not immediately see the connection; but the link between all these exhortations is that they are given against the background of tribulation, of persecutions coming upon the believers. In that context it is expected of them that they endure unto the end in order to be saved – for that is the Gospel of the Kingdom.

James 5 : 9
Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.
The Greek here does not say “sigh”, but “groan” or “murmur”. Murmuring from anger is not spoken out loud. Sometimes there is every reason to mutter, but it is better not to do it. Murmuring always has to do with not agreeing with the situation – a kind of under-the-breath protest – but, says

the apostle, you had better not do that, for when you condemn others, you also condemn yourselves.

> …for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself… (Romans 2:1; cf. vv. 2–4, 21)

It happens often enough that people condemn others and later fall into the very fault which they condemned in others. By that they pronounce judgement on themselves. Elsewhere we read:

> Judge not, that ye be not judged. (Matthew 7:1)

It is exactly the same thought. We may well be in danger of pronouncing a wrong judgement, and we would then have to answer for it. Therefore James says here: “behold, the judge standeth before the door.”

That Judge is the One from Matthew 25, who “shall sit upon the throne of his glory” (Matthew 25:31). Then He will gather the nations before Him and “he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:32–33). There it will be determined who shall go into that Kingdom – and how. Both aspects are present there. Brethren who are faithful in the time spoken of here in James will also be counted worthy to bear responsibility in the Kingdom. The Judge who will give His verdicts “standeth before the door”. The door speaks, of course, of entering into the Kingdom. It is that same door of which the Lord Jesus says:

> I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved… (John 10:9)

It is the door of entry into the Kingdom.

James 5 : 10

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

The apostle therefore gives examples. He gave an example already in James 5:7; he now gives another, and more follow, especially from the Old Testament. These prophets, who spoke “in the name of the Lord”, thereby came into a position of suffering, and therefore of longsuffering, for longsuffering and suffering belong together. Through suffering one would be inclined to lose courage, but the intention is that that courage holds out for a long time.

The prophets were persecuted, but they remained longsuffering; they persevered. They were also aware in whose service they stood and whose Word they spoke, and it was clear that He in whose service they stood is eternal. It is all about the imperishable Word of God.

Those who speak the Word of God come into suffering and are persecuted. That will certainly happen in a coming dispensation, for it is foretold in Revelation, especially in chapters 6 and 20. Many of those who speak the Word of the Lord will be killed “for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (Revelation 6:9; cf. 20:4). That is what it says: “for the testimony which they held”. They have spoken the Word of God. They have declared who the true King is.

The prophets ought to be taken as an example. We count them blessed because they stood in the service of the Lord. They will be rewarded by

Him, because they have fought the good fight, finished their course, and kept the faith – just like the apostle Paul, also one of the prophets.

James 5 : 11
Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.
Those who endure, we consider blessed and happy. We look up to them; we have them as examples. The specific example of Job is mentioned here. Job came into suffering. He was longsuffering and he endured. That is a reference to the last chapter of the book of Job, where Job is again blessed and, in principle, receives twice as much as he had at the beginning of the book.
Before he ever came into suffering, he already had many possessions. Then, for a time, everything went completely wrong for Job. He came into tribulation, but he endured; he was longsuffering. The end of the story is that the Lord intervenes, and Job receives twice as much as he had at first.
Job is a type of the Lord Jesus, who was humbled and went through suffering, but was ultimately exalted exceedingly. It is the path from glory to glory: from the glory of the old creation to the glory of the new creation. In between lies suffering.
Job endured, and the Lord Jesus Himself did so too, as we read in Hebrews. In Hebrews 12 the Lord Jesus is set before us:

> Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

He is now, in the meantime, seated at the right hand of God. That is the result of longsuffering, of suffering, and of endurance.
And then we are told that we ourselves have not yet had to show nearly as much endurance as the Lord Jesus Himself:

> Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. (Hebrews 12:4)

Sin is unbelief. There are those who went before us who have had to bear far more suffering than we have. They did not give up. They put their trust in the Lord – and we have seen “the end of the Lord”, as in the case of Job. The Lord Jesus Himself is seated at the right hand of God.
He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him” (Philippians 2:8–9). That is a universal truth which has special weight in that coming brief dispensation, for then men must endure unto the end in order to be saved.
What do we learn from the example of the Lord? That He is “very pitiful, and of tender mercy”. That is the thought; and both “pitiful” and “of tender mercy” are expressions taken from the Old Testament. They are typically Hebrew concepts: God who is merciful and God who has compassion on whom He will have compassion (“and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments”; “I… will

be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." – Exodus 20:6; 33:19; cf. Romans 9:18).
He certainly has compassion on those who must suffer for His Name and for His testimony.
James 5:7–11 brings but one thing to the fore: Be patient. It takes a while, but be longsuffering. It will be all right – within that very generation. That also appears from the rest of this passage, for its thrust is no different.

James 5 : 12
But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.
James says that it is fairly unwise to swear an oath. In swearing an oath, one calls upon another as witness; and, while we make a promise, we appoint that other to punish us if we do not keep our promise. Swearing an oath is simply making a promise, while at the same time "appointing" someone to ensure that it is indeed carried out.
In principle, an oath is sworn by the highest authority of all, and that is God. Because God had none greater by whom to swear, the epistle to the Hebrews says, He swore by Himself:

> For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself. (Hebrews 6:13)

He swore it Himself, and He Himself carried it out.
If it says here, "swear not at all", James immediately explains how that is to be understood: "neither by heaven, neither by the earth". For "to swear by heaven" means that one makes a promise and, in effect, calls down punishment from heaven upon oneself if one does not keep that promise. You had better not do that, for if you then cannot keep your promise, you will regret that you ever swore an oath. You would have done better not to promise at all and simply say, "I am sorry, I cannot do it." If, however, you have sworn an oath, you call judgement upon yourself.
The apostle says: do not do that, for it is far too dangerous. After all, you do not even know what you can and cannot do. The situation in the world is so uncertain that it is not responsible to swear such an oath.
"To swear by the earth" is far too low. Someone who is the property of Christ does not swear by anything that is on the earth, for what right does the earth have over a believer?
Besides, in those days to which this epistle finally applies, that notorious beast from Revelation will be in power – the antichrist will rule – and a believer cannot swear by him. For the one by whom you swear is the one whom you thereby empower to bring judgement on you. Nor is it wise to call down judgement from above.
James says: better remain modest; look to the Lord; recognise how unstable this life is. Expect everything only from the Lord. No big words, no misuse of the tongue. No grand promises, but: your yes should be yes, and your no, no.

James 5 : 13

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

There is a strong likelihood that this “affliction” comes from that tribulation from above – namely from those vials of the wrath of God that are poured out upon the earth (Revelation 16), or from the seven trumpets that sound over the earth (Revelation 8–11). Those seven vials and seven trumpets are in force in the “33 years”. On the one hand there is the wrath of God; on the other there are the trumpets which speak of the message (the Gospel) of God.

In such tribulation or affliction there is little else to be done but to pray. One can only go to the Lord. On earth there is nothing to be sought – and certainly not in those days.

Even in our own days there is not very much to be expected from the things on this earth. Our life here on earth is already uncertain now, but then it will be far more so. Now there is temptation and there is tribulation, but then it will be “great tribulation” –

> “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (Matthew 24:21)

– and then it will be “the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world” –

> “…the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” (Revelation 3:10).

That is the difference: it is then intensified. Nowhere else in Scripture, not even in the Pauline epistles, do we find such a list of these matters of tribulation and distress. Here we do, because it concerns that special time.

“Let him pray” means: he is to use his mouth. He is expected to use his mouth, his tongue. For what? To pray. Let him speak unto God. He is the only One from whom an afflicted person can expect anything within a foreseeable time.

The opposite of someone who is afflicted is someone who is merry – who sings psalms. Yet in essence it comes to the same thing: speaking unto God. In Scripture, singing psalms is collectively speaking the same things unto God; it does not even have to be set to music. In Romans 15:6 it says:

> “That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

and then Old Testament passages are cited (Romans 15:9–12). “In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (cf. Psalm 22:22, 25). The point is that the Lord, in the midst of His congregation, together with the congregation, sings the praise of God. We confess this with one mouth, though it comes from many mouths; that is then called “singing”.

The preceding verses spoke of dependence upon God. “Prayer” in the Bible always includes giving God glory. Prayer is always worship, and in some cases also petition; but even when we ask something of God, that is worship. For in asking, we acknowledge His omnipotence, His mercy, and His grace. Generally, when one asks something of someone, one assumes that that person is able to give what is asked. Thus even asking something

of God is, in the first place, worship and an acknowledgement of His authority.

Sickness and prayer

James 5 : 14

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

Now we suddenly come to quite another subject. It becomes more involved here, because “sick” does not mean a mere cold or the like. Being sick in Scripture is always connected with the losing of life. In short: sickness is always the pathway towards death. Someone who is sick is in danger of dying. More than once the Lord was called to those of whom it was said that they were sick; and when He came, they had already died. Behind every disease death threatens. It is not a mere affliction or something that will soon pass, but sickness. Quite some effort is made that this believer should be healed. The apostle is still addressing “brethren”. And then it does not say that he must call the doctor, but that he must call “the elders of the church”.

The elders in Scripture are the leading brethren – not those who have been officially appointed to such a role, but those who actually do it. “Elder” and “elders” are words used for the same people that in other places are also called “overseers”. He gives leadership on the basis of his experience. In practice, this means first of all that he is someone who teaches and thus bears responsibility. When leadership must be exercised in the assembly here on earth, it is done by those called “elders” or “overseers”.

So someone is ill and in danger of dying – that also appears from the following verses. The point is that he should be healed. If he expected to recover as a matter of course, he need not call for the elders. It is precisely because he thinks he will not recover that he calls them.

The intention is that these elders should pray over him. That means that someone else, or several others, turn to the Lord on his behalf. We do not find anything like this in Paul’s epistles. There we read that we, without any further mediation, may go directly to God through the Lord Jesus, who is our Advocate and our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:14–16; 8:6; 9:15; 10:19–22; 12:24; 1 John 2:1).

The situation described here is characteristic of the preaching of the Kingdom. In the days of the Lord Jesus, the Lord Himself once sent out His disciples (Matthew 10:1–7; Mark 6:7–13; Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–9). The seventy who were sent out to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom received certain authority with that commission. They had authority, in the name of the Lord, to do certain things.

In His well-known commission the Lord Jesus says that those who follow Him shall lay hands on the sick (Mark 16:15–18). They even receive the possibility of imparting the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17; 19:6). They also healed people by laying on of hands (Acts 28:8).

Oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is life. Oil is therefore a type of life – eternal life. That is the point with the virgins who had to go and buy oil from those that sell (Matthew 25): it is about life. Here we have

something similar, for it concerns essentially the same time – the time of the preaching of the Kingdom of heaven on earth.
This man is ill, in danger of dying, and is anointed with oil. Oil is a picture of life – and so he is healed. That is the line of thought. He is restored through the mediation of these elders.
I am convinced that these elders, in that future application, will belong to the 144,000, for they are the elders, the first ones, the sealed ones; they have that authority and those commissions. They are the official representatives of the King.
For anyone who struggles with this, the question is: how then? Since when must we go to the Lord through someone else? In this present dispensation, that is not so. It is only in that situation so, because then it will not only be a religious matter but also an earthly, and thus political, matter. Then earthly standards are imposed.
Christ being the Mediator does not conflict with a mediating function of the 144,000 or of others. In our fifth dispensation we know no other Mediator. It is true that we may be brought to that Mediator by others – by elders, for instance, who lead us to new birth or to life – but it need not be so. That is the difference with the coming dispensation. There it must be so, because there it is also an earthly affair. There is official registration and such.
The Lord on earth is the Mediator. When He was on earth, people could travel to the Lord Jesus. Afterwards the Lord sent “another Comforter” (John 14:16), and He comes into our hearts, so that in this dispensation we have a direct link with the Mediator, and thus with God Himself.
In the dispensation of the coming of the Lord, however, we are again dealing with the earthly manifestation of the Lord, and then matters are again different. Then one comes to the Lord through those who represent Him. Ambassadors of Christ exist today as well, but they are not necessary in order to come to God. In the next dispensation it is not only about spiritual matters but also about earthly ones, and in that sphere a special role is reserved for the 144,000 – those sealed servants of the Lord (Revelation 7:3). They are untouchable, they have special authority; such a situation does not exist today.
The sick man for whom the elders pray is guaranteed to get well. That is not the case now. Why should a believer, of necessity, recover? Why should his body be healed? Ought he not rather to be delivered from that body? It is essentially necessary that a man put off his body and so die. Why then should a believer have to be healed? Paul was not healed; nor was Timothy.
The answer is simple: because within at most 33 years that Kingdom which was promised to the sick man will be manifested on earth. That has been promised him. It follows that he must live to see it, as it were. If he dies before the thousand years begin, he does not go into them. Abraham died before that time and will not enter the thousand years. He waits for “a city which hath foundations” (Hebrews 11:10), which only comes after the thousand years, according to Revelation 20–21.
To these people in James the Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2, cf. vv. 1–

6). They do so – and now they are in danger of dying before that Kingdom is set up! Then what happens is very simple: exactly what happened in the days of the Lord Jesus.
If they fall ill, He heals them. If they die, He raises them from the dead. You may say: but He did not do that with all believers in His days. I would answer: oh no? And how do you know that? How many rose from the graves when the Lord Himself died?
“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,
And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” (Matthew 27:52–53)
It does not say how many, but it does say that the graves were opened. Those who arose then were indeed seen by others, after the resurrection of Christ.
We rise from the dead on the basis of the resurrection of Christ. Yet there were some who rose before the Lord rose, so that they did not rise in “newness of life”, but simply in the old body. The only reasonable explanation is that these were believers who were raised because the Kingdom had been preached to them, but they had died before that Kingdom could be established.
They are therefore raised from the dead at the moment at which the old covenant ends, so that afterwards they lived under the new covenant – for they were believers; and so they lived after the resurrection of Christ. If that had not happened, they would belong to the Old Testament saints and would not be raised until the last day. They would therefore never have entered that Kingdom on earth.
Now they lived on for a few days or years. They were raised and died again, but they did indeed enter that Kingdom and even belong to the church, to the firstfruits.
That situation of those days repeats itself in the future, when the Gospel of the Kingdom is preached again. Believers who die in those days will be raised at the beginning of the thousand years (Revelation 20:4ff).
In that coming dispensation believers will be raised. They cannot help it that they died before the coming of the Kingdom. They have endured as long as they could, and therefore they are raised at the beginning of the thousand years. Believers in that dispensation cannot die a natural death. They may fall ill, and if they abide by the rules they will be healed and will survive not only those 33 years but also the thousand years which follow. If an illness threatens to get out of hand, then something must be wrong. That is why he must go to the elders. In fact it means that such a sick person must repent – for that is what it comes down to. He must, “for the first time or anew”, present himself to those whom the Lord has appointed as His representatives in connection with the establishment of that Kingdom. He must present himself there, and they will yet mediate for him, and he will be healed.

James 5 : 15
And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

This does not concern some detailed sort of faith of: we ask something of God, and if we believe hard enough that He will do it, He will indeed do it – so that the answer to prayer depends on whether we believe it enough. People have made it into that, but that is not the point here.
The point is that this man must be a believer. Then the prayer of such a man, or the prayer on behalf of such a man, is the prayer of faith. The prayer of this believer will finally and definitively save the sick man. That is a sure matter.
It is suggested that this sick man has indeed committed certain sins. Generally speaking, sickness is not the result of particular deeds, but of the sinful nature. I am therefore not saying that when a believer is ill, it is because of a wrong way of life, or a wrong attitude, or some rebellion against God. That is absolutely not the case. All men fall ill and die as a result of the sinful nature which they received at birth.
I do believe that these elders refer to the 144,000 from Revelation 7:4. James was indeed written in the past, in the days of Acts, but those days are of the same character as the coming dispensation. They were the days in which the Kingdom of Christ could have been manifested on earth. The apostles – the twelve – then fulfilled the same function as the 144,000 will later do. They are the ones who have the commissions. They are the ones who bear responsibility and who also act with authority in the assembly, because they are directly inspired by God Himself. They are special apostles with a very special calling. Such a situation does not exist at present.
“Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” is a solemn act. It took place in the Old Testament, and it occurred when the preaching was directed towards the revelation of the Kingdom of Christ on earth.
The king of Israel had to be anointed with oil, and an elder was sent to do so – Samuel. He was the one whom the Lord sent to anoint Saul, and later to anoint David. So it had to do with the manifestation of a kingdom on earth.
The feet of the Lord Jesus were anointed as a picture of the resurrection. That anointing is done with oil, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit. And the Lord Jesus was certainly anointed with the Spirit – that is clearly stated.

> “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me…” (Isaiah 61:1; cited in Luke 4:18).

Anointing with oil is always a picture of the giving of the Spirit; and the Spirit is life. When this sick man is anointed with oil as a picture of the Spirit, it is thus clear that he, as it were, receives life back. This is not some uncertain thing of: you never know, but it is worth a try; if it doesn’t help, it doesn’t harm either. That is how it is sometimes applied nowadays. But here it stands as a certainty. The prayer of faith is the prayer of the believer. This does not take place after some length of time, and it does not speak of resurrection, but of the healing of this sick man. It is worded somewhat strangely perhaps, but the situation itself ought to be clear.
The fact that they go not to the physician but to the elders when ill shows that the sick man is aware that this illness does not have a medical cause but another cause. They are not sent to a doctor, but to the elders, so that

the illness does not have its primary cause in some medical issue, but in something else – and that other cause is then apparently that this sick person has committed sins.
Yet it does not say that straightforwardly. It says: “and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” In other words: we do not know for certain; it does not say so outright. That is exactly the point, for it depends on which dispensation we apply this to and exactly what we are speaking about. Moreover, it is not the intent of this verse that we weaponise it against one another.
You cannot simply say that someone has caught the flu because he has sinned. Illness is not necessarily the result of sins. Illness is always the result of sin – of the sinful nature.
If we therefore say that illness is the consequence of sin, we are quite right. But if we say that sicknesses are the result of sins, then things become more complicated. It could be so, but it need not be so. This verse does not exclude the possibility that this sick person has indeed committed sins. It does not say that he has, but the very fact that the possibility is mentioned shows that this may well be the cause of that illness.
We must not turn this around. It is therefore worded very cautiously.
1 Corinthians 11 : 27–29
Concerning our present dispensation, the same principle exists in Scripture with regard to sickness and sin – though it is less well known. We go to 1 Corinthians 11, where bread and cup are discussed.

> 1 Corinthians 11 : 27–29
> Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.
> For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

The words “of the Lord” in “the Lord’s body” are not in the Greek text at the end of verse 29; it simply says “not discerning the body”. That body is not the physical body of the Lord but the Body of Christ – the same body as in the following chapters.
Someone who does not acknowledge or discern the Body of Christ, and yet eats and drinks, takes a great risk upon himself.
Someone who eats and drinks “unworthily” is someone who does not take the meaning of the bread and the cup seriously. Bread and cup are the expression that we are all “partakers of that one bread” (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17), that we partake of one and the same Body. When we eat of the bread and drink of the cup, we express thereby that we are members of the Body of Christ.
That has consequences, for if you are a member of the Body of Christ, then you also occupy a place in that Body. In the following chapter, 1 Corinthians 12, it is shown that the members of that Body have different gifts, and although the members differ, it is still one and the same Body.
The primary point is not that we should actually sit down at one table and eat together of that one bread, but that we, in the practical course of life,

take account of one another and are conscious of the unity which we together have in Christ – and thus of the responsibility we have for one another, that we should bear one another's burdens.
That is: taking a place in the assembly. If you do not take that place, you eat and drink unworthily, for then it has no practical meaning. That is what is pointed out here, and therefore it continues:

> 1 Corinthians 11 : 30
> For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

"Sleep" does not mean that they cannot stay awake in the meeting, but that they have died. It begins with weakness. One step further, they are sick indeed; it is a rising sequence. And a step further again, they have died.
This is called "sleep" because "death" is supposed to be a final separation, whereas the death of a believer is never a final separation. It is always temporary, and a temporary separation in Scripture is called "sleep".
Because the Lord knew that Lazarus would be raised, He said:

> "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John 11:11)

After which He corrected Himself toward the disciples and said plainly:

> "Lazarus is dead." (John 11:14)

Medically speaking, he was dead – but since he was to be raised, he "slept". It all depends on how it ends.
So it is with these believers. They sleep – not in the sense that they are spiritually inattentive, but in the sense that they have died physically. A judgement has come upon them, it says here, because they ate and drank unworthily. And then comes the explanation:

> 1 Corinthians 11 : 31
> For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

He who eats and drinks unworthily is thus the one who does not judge himself – who takes part simply because that is apparently what one does, or because he happens to like it; and afterwards he does nothing more with it. It is gone.
When we express that we are one with Christ and thus with the assembly, that has consequences for our practical walk. When we, as believers, know these things, but do not accept those consequences, we take a great risk upon ourselves.
As with a branch that does not bear fruit, so it may be cut off (John 15:2). That does not mean that he then perishes for ever – that is not the point – but that the possibility is then taken away from him to bear fruit. A branch that is cut off cannot bear fruit.
If a believer is cut off, it may well be that he dies. We as believers do not live here on earth out of boredom; we live here with the Spirit in us, with Christ dwelling in our hearts, in order that even through this old sinful body we might yet bear fruit for the Lord.
If we do not do so, or withdraw ourselves from that, or even hinder the Lord, then we take upon ourselves the risk that the Lord, after some time, will say: "Now it is enough."

The life of a believer and his relationship with the Lord are interconnected. Yet you cannot say, simply because someone is ill, that the Lord does that because he has sinned or because he does not know his place in the assembly. You can never say that.

The promised Kingdom

The situation here in James must therefore be seen against the background of the coming dispensation. Those who live then, in those days – to them, as believers, that Kingdom on earth has been promised, and they shall enter it. It has been promised them in a verse we all know, though its meaning is little understood:

> Matthew 24 : 34
> Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

This verse speaks of the days that are still to come. It does not speak about our present days. In Matthew 24 it is written that the gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, and that one must endure unto the end. Such statements you certainly do not find in the Pauline epistles, because they do not concern our dispensation.

Enduring unto the end belongs to the next dispensation, at the revelation of the Kingdom. And that "end" is not the end of the world in the sense of annihilation, nor simply physical death, but the end of the age – for that is the subject of this chapter.

"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming,
and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3)

Verse 14 says:

> "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Matthew 24:14)

The "gospel of the kingdom" had just been defined in the previous verse: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:13)

Then shall the end – of the age, of course – come. In the verses that follow, the Lord explains how that will come to pass. Verse 34 concludes that section:

> "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (Matthew 24:34)

"This generation" – that is indeed what it means – shall in no wise pass away until all these things have happened.

So: when the gospel of the Kingdom has been preached in all the world – that is, when it has been proclaimed that salvation consists in believing and enduring unto the end – then it is clear that this "being saved" is nothing else than entering into the manifested Kingdom of Christ on earth. That is the thought: they must enter that Kingdom.

And all that is preached within one generation, so that those who live in that generation may actually enter that Kingdom.

If, then, someone is on the point of collapsing – physically, morally, or spiritually – for whatever reason, something is wrong. But then the

preaching of James is simply this: do what is written in James. Call for the elders of the church; let them anoint you with oil.

> “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick.” (James 5:15)

That is in full harmony with what was said earlier in the Gospels concerning the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom. There too we read that signs should follow them that believe:

> “…Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:8)

All that would take place, for it belongs to the preaching of the Kingdom:

> “And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 10:7)

And since all this will happen again in the future – just as in the days of Acts and in the days of James – we also find a similar statement in the Gospel of Mark:

> Mark 6 : 12–13
> And they went out, and preached that men should repent.
> And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

In the days of the Gospels the gospel of the Kingdom was preached. The outlook was to the revelation of the King and the Kingdom. Hence also that many sick were healed.

This continues straight into James. Historically that is a very logical line, but prophetically it is also logical, because those days of the Gospels will be repeated in the future.

Then they will indeed preach repentance and endurance to the end in order to be saved, with the Lord Himself as the great Physician, who gives them life so that they may truly enter the promised Kingdom.

James 5 : 16

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

What was described in the previous verse already happened there: a man was ill, he confessed his trespasses, and the elders prayed for him. Here that is generalised.

Obviously it concerns the trespasses we have committed against one another, for this verse has nothing to do with the institution of the Roman confessional. It means simply this: if we have wronged someone, we should put it right and confess it.

“That ye may be healed” still refers to literal sickness, just as in verse 14. The purpose is that they should remain one, and as believers stay close to one another.

It is therefore not at all far-fetched to compare this with the situation in 1 Corinthians 11, for there the subject is exactly the same: the unity which exists among believers, the one Body, and the responsibility we bear towards one another.

In connection with the coming dispensation, this is mentioned very explicitly in the first epistle of John. That epistle also speaks in the first

place about that future dispensation, in which that antichrist of whom John speaks will be manifested (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).
“A fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” says James 5:16. The point is, of course, an honest prayer. It is not about a formula or a ritual, but about a real prayer of a righteous man.
And this is illustrated by the history of Elijah – “Elias” in Greek.

James 5 : 17
Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain:
and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.
“Passions” (or “affections”) here are those inward movements: his states of soul, his motives, his deliberations. You understand what is being said: Elijah was a man like us – with the same weaknesses and fluctuations – and he prayed, and God heard that prayer.
There was of course much more behind it, but it is given as a very real example. Elijah’s prayer accomplished something immense in heaven. The remarkable thing is that in 1 Kings 17 we hardly find that prayer of Elijah mentioned at all.

> **1 Kings 17 : 1**
> And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab,
> As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years,
> but according to my word.

That he specifically prayed for it is not even recorded there. It certainly was so, but Scripture pays little direct attention to the prayer itself. Elijah is then sent away by the Lord who says:
“Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith…” (1 Kings 17:3)
And in verse 6 it says: “and he drank of the brook.”
The point is the principle: Elijah was a man like we are, and he prayed to the Lord that it might not rain – and it did not rain, three years and six months.
How did James know that it was three years and six months? That detail is nowhere found in the Old Testament. But James knew it, for he knew it from his Brother. The Lord Jesus Himself says it in Luke 4:25.
Why, then, is this detail added – “three years and six months”? For the Old Testament itself it evidently did not matter, for it is not given there.
It is mentioned because it is a hidden reference to the 3½ years of great tribulation that will come upon Israel in the future.
Just as faithful Elijah, in his 3½ years of drought, had to go abroad to receive food there (1 Kings 17:3ff.), so it will be in those future 3½ years. The blessings which God gives will not be found in the land, but outside the land, from beyond Jordan. That is the thought, and that is precisely why they in Nazareth became so angry, for they understood that all too well.

So a clear reference is made to the tribulation for Israel, even though the epistle of James does not primarily speak of those 3½ years but of the 33 years of tribulation over all nations that will follow.
That is a much broader tribulation, because it is not restricted to Israel but afterwards extends over all the nations. Both situations are designated "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). Only for Israel, as the elect, are those days shortened (Matthew 24:22). For them they are limited to 1260 days; but for the rest of the nations it continues for a further 33 years.

James 5 : 18
And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.
According to 1 Kings 18:44 a little cloud arose out of the sea, "like a man's hand". It is the hand of the LORD that then again comes over the people and blesses them. The hand of God is stretched out in blessing over Israel. That hand is the picture of "five" – of grace – the grace of God coming over the land. The thought is that God delivered Israel from the famine. And the argument of James is: if that was possible in the days of Elijah, through the prayer of that righteous man, then it is also possible through the prayer of a righteous man in our days and certainly in the future.
In our days, however, this principle is somewhat restricted, because God works only in secret. There are no spectacular things that everyone can see, for that would contradict the character of the present dispensation. But the principle remains: the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. In our case those prayers relate primarily to the spiritual blessings we have received, but also to material things.

James 5 : 19
Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;
That someone sins is one thing – for the gospel itself declares that we have Someone who cleanses us and takes away our sins. If someone sins but loves the truth, knows the truth, and acknowledges it, then there is a remedy: the Lord Himself.
But it is far more serious if someone errs from the truth – then he is lost as to his course here. He rejects it.
Between these two extremes we have the situation of a believer, a born-again man, who does not endure – who does not continue to fight the good fight of faith unto the end. He does not hold on; he lets it go. He becomes disobedient to the truth and sets it aside.
He who errs from the truth, in that future dispensation, plays recklessly with his life; he forfeits his title to it. This happened in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11) and it happens here in James 5 as well.
He no longer accepts the Word of God. Then the result is that he squanders his life, for he who departs from the truth departs from life. Therefore such a one should be converted.
He knows the truth, he has departed from it, and must be brought back to the point from which he turned aside. "To convert" literally means "to turn back on the way that one has left."

When one has erred from the truth and is converted, it means he is brought back onto the original way – to the truth.
The difficulty is that, according to Hebrews 6:4–6, this is very difficult, almost impossible. It says there that it is impossible, concerning those who have erred from the truth, that we should renew them again unto repentance.
It is not impossible for us to renew ourselves to repentance – God can do that in us – but it is impossible for us to renew another. People who have been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost – of such, Paul says that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. They already know everything but do not want to change.
The only thing that remains is to pray for them, for the prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

James 5 : 20
Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death,
and shall hide a multitude of sins.
“The sinner” here is the one who lets the Word of God lie and does not put his trust in it – the one who wanders from the truth.
If such a man does repent, or is converted, then thereby a soul is saved from death.
We must read this in connection with the preceding verses, for it says: “shall save a soul from death.” If, then, one converts another from the error of his way, he shall save that person from death – he “shall save a soul from death.”
The “soul” is not the term for the new, born-again man, but for the old man – the natural life. The point here, then, is not that such a one thereby becomes eternally saved, but that he remains alive on earth to enter the thousand years.
If it therefore says that one shall save a soul from death, it means that he preserves someone from the death of the old man – that he remains alive in the body. That agrees fully with verses 15 and 16 which speak of the healing of the sick man. He will live on, here on earth – that is the “soul”, the earthly life; otherwise it would have said “spirit”.
He who, in the period primarily spoken of here, does not endure unto the end, who departs from the truth, shall not remain alive to go into the thousand years. Not that he is then eternally lost – that is not the point – but he will not share that earthly Kingdom.
You must see this in the next dispensation. But it does not stand completely apart from our own, for the truth itself is the same.
I am reminded of what we read in:

1 Peter 1 : 9
Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

There too it appears that it concerns a salvation which the believer receives while he is still on earth in the body. The thousand years are part of the salvation which the believer in that dispensation receives while still

in the body. Thus “the salvation of your souls” has to do with an inheritance received here on earth, not yet in the eternal state.
Hence the earnest tone of these final verses of James. The point is that they should endure unto the end.
The believers are given to one another as helpers, for:

> “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” (James 5:16)

They are to help each other through that generation, in order then to enter the thousand years. All this takes place in a time when the believers – all those who do not bear the mark of the beast – will be persecuted and fall prey even to the sword.
Under such circumstances it is very understandable that one might let go of the truth. But that does mean that he will not enter the thousand years. Hence the urgent appeal that they should “convert” one another – that they should bring their fellow-believer back to the truth in order that he may endure unto the end and be saved. It concerns his earthly course, the path he walks here on earth.

Different scope, same principle

It is not only about the coming dispensation, for these same truths hold good for us today, though with a much more limited scope.
Of course we too receive reward if we endure here on earth, if we fight the good fight unto the end and so on. But we are not expecting a thousand-year, earthly Kingdom. We have a heavenly destiny.
Therefore the force of these things is for us not so direct or so sharp. But the underlying thought is exactly the same: while we live here on earth – “in the soul” – we are to bear fruit for Him.
And if we bring back a believer who has departed from that truth, then we bring him back to the Lord and save him from death – perhaps literally, but in any case in the wider sense of the word, for he will again be in a position to bear fruit and to receive the crown of life.
The beautiful thing is that in the last verse of the epistle – written “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1) – the application to the coming dispensation is underlined once more. I refer to the words: “and shall hide a multitude of sins.” (James 5:20)
Suppose someone has wandered away all those 33 years and yet survives – and just before the end repents and returns to the truth – then he will enter the thousand years. I judge that chance, practically speaking, very small, but theoretically it is so. Hence: all those sins committed in that period will be covered. All that wandering is covered, and he nevertheless goes into the thousand years. That shows the importance of such a conversion.
So it is with us also. Not because it “must”, but because we love the Lord, it grieves us when we see fellow-believers on a path where they do not belong – a path which does not allow them to bear fruit for the Lord. Surely we shall do all we can, as far as lies within our power, to bring them back to the way of the truth. Perhaps we cannot do anything directly in deeds, but we still say: the prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

In many situations prayer is the only thing we can do for brothers and sisters who have departed from the Truth. Let us therefore not underestimate the influence believers have, and the place believers occupy before God and before the throne.
For it is the Lord who goes with His own; He it is who cares for His church, who sustains the believers, who promises that they shall not be tempted above that they are able, and so forth. All this we have considered in connection with this epistle.
When we, in this present time, endure in our fight of faith, we too shall receive reward. Only, that reward has nothing to do with the thousand-year Kingdom on earth, but with the crown which we shall receive when we stand before the judgement seat of Christ.
The foundational principle is the same, but the scope is different.
The time spoken of in this epistle of James is the time of the coming dispensation – the time after the “rapture of the church”.
Amen.